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THE EAVESDROPPER.

AN UNPARALLELED EXPERIENCE.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

IN BED.

I HAD been very ill, some people (I know) had said 'dying,' for many days. Upon the whole I had been inclined to agree with them. It had neither pleased nor displeased me to do so; a pretty sure sign that my case was serious.

For who to dumb Forgetfulness a prey
This pleasing anxious being e'er resigned,
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
Nor cast one longing lingering look behind?

inquires the poet; to which I answer 'a good many people, and especially those who are half dead already.' When we are very ill it does not seem worth while to prolong the unequal contest which Nature herself seems to be waging against us. 'What must be, must be; and please, nurse, give me some more barley water.' There is no subject upon which more rubbish has been written than on the thoughts of sick men. When the Destroyer seizes us in health and strength and, like a policeman addressing a criminal, exclaims, 'You come along with me,' the case is quite different. We resent his brutality exceedingly, and above all his obstinacy in refusing bail. There *must* be, we think, some mistake somewhere; he is confusing us with Jones, our senior by ten

years, or with Brown, who is a chronic invalid with a temper to match, and who really *ought* to be sent for. But after lying here for weeks, between asleep and awake, 'to cease upon the midnight with no pain,' seemed no such very hard fate; or, at all events, I had learnt to face it with tolerable indifference. I had no dear ones to leave behind me, wherein, as all medical testimony is agreed, lies the rub. 'In an immense experience,' writes a great physician, 'I have never seen a patient distressed at dying, though often at the prospect of parting with those dear to him.' For, indeed, men are not so sure as they would have us believe of meeting with them again.

Well, that has been spared me. I cannot say I have neither kith nor kin, but such as I have are very distant relatives, and they have always maintained their distance with fine judgment and excellent taste. One may love one's cousin as well as anybody else, but to love him because he *is* my cousin—because my uncle (whom I never liked) married my aunt (whom I positively *disliked*)—is a most illogical deduction. For my part I am indebted to nobody save for my existence, a thing as I have reason to believe about to slip away from me, and one moreover which I don't think was even so much as in the mind of the donors. In times like these one must be excused for taking a practical view of matters. My parents would doubtless have provided for me if they could, but it was out of their power. If it be true that Heaven helps them who help themselves, Providence befriended me. I could say of myself, indeed, if I were going to stay in it, that I am well-to-do in the world. If it be asked how I made my money—but nobody does ask when one has got it; it is only when one has lost it, or never had any, that folks are curious and sympathetic. ('How *could* you be such a fool? How the deuce do you manage to get along?' and so on.) I say if you ask, however, I must tell the truth; with men in my condition there are few reserves, little false pride, and no delicacy whatever. I made my money by literature.

Many will say 'Impossible!' and I admit that the operation is difficult—very different from an operation in the city, though so much smaller—but, nevertheless, I accomplished it. I had not, indeed, made what is somewhat pompously called 'an honoured name' for myself, but I had made a name that was honoured by, after all, the most important person in any civilised community—one's banker. The circumstances of my case—I am not

speaking of my physical condition, which is unhappily straightforward enough, but of my literary fortunes—are rather curious, and seem indirectly to bear out Mr Francis Galton's views upon heredity. I had an uncle (the one I never liked) devoted to literature, and whose works made exactly the same impression upon the public as my own—namely, none at all. The reason, too, was precisely the same—for they were never printed.

If I don't make myself intelligible all at once, my position must be my excuse for it; I am writing in pencil, under the bed-clothes—pen and ink being denied me by the doctor's orders, and the nurse an uncommonly sharp one. I don't use the term 'cunning,' which I heard her apply to *me* the other day, when I was supposed to be under the influence of a narcotic pill—which I had slipped into my vest, like Jack the Giant-killer, and is now reposing under my pillow with the rest of them—because it is an offensive one, and recrimination just now is, I hope, far from my thoughts.

CHAPTER II.

RETROSPECTIVE.

My family were agricultural; it was before these bad times came, when to be 'a little short of money' is more aristocratic than the gout, and suggests at once some connection with the landed interest; but, so far as we were concerned, they might just as well have already arrived. We had enough to live on, in a poorish way, and that was all; there was no margin, and the outlook for the next generation was hopeless enough. I was an only child, but the phrase lacked the usual prosperous significance. I was a well-conducted youth enough, but I might just as well, as far as prospects went, have been the prodigal son; nay, better, for he had at heart (though it was all over) the consciousness of having enjoyed himself.

I may as well admit at once that I was not of much use on the farm. Whether this arose from the delicacy of my constitution, as my mother asserted, or from mere idleness, as my father said, or from some marvellous prevision of genius (as I myself am inclined to think) which told me that the farming business was played out and not worth while exerting oneself about, it is now useless to inquire.

A great deal has been written about the attractions of husbandry, but in reality they are limited to the summer months. 'Falsely luxurious, will not man awake?' inquires the poet of the 'Seasons' (who, another poet tells us, was so constitutionally lazy that he was once caught eating peaches off a wall with his hands in his pockets); but to get up before it is light to superintend the operations of agriculture in winter is a hateful duty, the very remembrance of which is disagreeable to me. It is true that in due time there are some interesting results, the waving corn, the bearded barley, the new-mown hay; but in the meanwhile it is like going behind the scenes of a theatre weeks before the first rehearsal.

I much preferred to read about pastoral life in poems and novels, or to write about it in mellifluous verse, to taking an active part in it. To be fond of reading was phenomenal in my family, but to write things 'out of one's own head,' as they expressed it, seemed to them nothing less than a portent. The parents of Dick, Tom, and Harry, my cousins, could boast even more proudly than the Douglas (because they had no shameful exception of a Gawain to blush for), that no son of theirs had ever penned a line; whereas I was constantly writing lines, and even lines that rhymed with one another. Those horrid boys used to ride up to our house upon horses much too large for them and inquire scornfully after Ned the poet. At a time like this, I wish to say nothing against my own flesh and blood; if they had not lived in the same parish we might have been better friends; but, as it was, they were much more near than dear to me. It was only my mother who understood (and even she but dimly) that I was a born genius. The editors of our county newspapers, though they had many opportunities of being informed of the fact, showed themselves grossly ignorant of this by returning my MSS., while those of the metropolitan magazines entered into a conspiracy of silence. This, I am told, is one of their devices for promoting, or perhaps obtaining, a circulation. They do not answer you, and rely upon your purchasing copies of their periodical in hopes of seeing yourself in print; the whole of my pocket money, except what was spent in stationery, went in postage. It is all very well to talk about 'hiving one's sweet thoughts and putting them in books,' but it is much easier to do the first than the second. I hived enough of them to last for seven winters' reading, but they remained in manuscript; there were stacks of

them almost as big as those in our farmyard, but they rarely went to market, or if they did they came back again, generally unpaid. Dick, the most objectionable of my relatives, once inquired whether we insured them, like the ricks.

When I came of age, Uncle Theodore sent for me, as he had done, at the same epoch, with all my cousins. It was quite understood that we went to him on trial, and that if we pleased him we should hear of something to our advantage from his solicitors after his decease. As I have already observed, I never liked him, but it is only right and proper, as my readers will admit, when they come to know all, that he should have a few pages of description. He had been a son of the soil like the rest of us, but had fled from the plough—and the harrow—in early youth, and gone to sea, where, by some unknown means (though I always suspected piracy, and made him the unconscious hero of a good many tales of blood and treasure), he had amassed a considerable fortune. After thirty years of absence he had returned to his native land, purchased the farmhouse in Westmoreland in which he had been born, and retired there to end his days.

It was a long way off from our place, and the railway fare was itself a consideration, but of course such a golden chance was not to be thrown away, though I felt it to be a very small one. Tom, Dick, and Harry had all gone in their turn to Burton Hawse, to be weighed in Uncle Theodore's balance, and been found wanting; and so far I didn't blame him; they *were* 'wanting' in more senses than one; but, on the other hand, I seemed to be still less likely to please him. The virtues which were the passports to his favour, as he had already given out, were of the vulgarest description—Diligence, Duty, Perseverance, and so on; and of all his fellow-creatures he most admired those who began life with half-a-crown in their pockets and died worth half a million. The half-a-crown I had got, though at twenty-one I could scarcely be said to be beginning life with it; but as to Diligence and all the rest of it, the less a young farmer who never got up in the morning if he could help it, and preferred keeping up the parlour fire to any outdoor occupation whatever, was cross-examined upon that point the better. The notion of Ned the poet going to try *his* chance with Uncle Theodore tickled indeed those of my relatives who had already undergone that ordeal exceedingly, without arousing one single spark of jealousy or apprehension.

My mother, however, had her secret hopes, as I gathered from a reply I overheard my father make to her when speaking of my approaching visit, 'What's the use of his knowing how to play his cards, when his uncle has not a pack in the house?' My male parent was very literal and commonplace, but by no means without a certain practical vigour. An example of it, which afterwards (people tell me) proved of great importance to me, took place at the very moment of my departure. My slender wardrobe had been stowed in a portmanteau and carpet bag; but a very large package, under which Joe the Carter was staggering, was about to be added to them, when my father inquired what it contained.

'It has some of dear Ned's last stories and poems, which he means to read to his Uncle o' nights,' replied my mother, with some pardonable pride.

'Has it got anything else in it?'

'No.'

'Then give it here, Joe;' and with an almost superhuman exertion of his vast physical strength, my father chucked it into the horsepond.

CHAPTER III.

UNCLE THEODORE.

A MAN'S *amour propre* is always more or less tender, and that of the literary man especially so; it may therefore be imagined what I suffered at having my immortal works thus treated by the author of my being. Whatever editors and publishers may have thought of them, I had myself the very highest opinion of their value, and their loss might well have turned a proud young heart to gall; it did not turn mine, however, perhaps because my nature was an exceptionally noble one, though it is fair to say that the consciousness of having rough copies of every one of those precious MSS. under my little bed at home may have had something to do with it. This, however, my father did not know; he is gone where there are no MSS. and I have long forgiven him; but when I called to mind that he had heard them all read aloud from his son's lips I could only attribute his desire to prevent Uncle Theodore from enjoying the same treat to an unworthy jealousy.

The station was a good way from Burton Hawse; and a trap

driven by a farm servant had been sent to meet me. He was as taciturn as other members of his class, but had a habit of bursting out into guffaws of laughter, which a good deal discomposed me.

'What are you laughing about, my good man?' I ventured to inquire, at the third explosion.

'Master,' he replied with cheerful frankness; then added, as with an afterthought, 'and yourself.'

By dexterous cross-examination I got out of him that what tickled him so was the reflection that I was the fifth nephew whom he had driven to my uncle's house 'on approval;' and now, as he understood (and expressed it), he had got to 'the back end' of the family.

None of them had stayed beyond a week, except Harry, who had had the misfortune to break his leg (from one of the loose stone walls of the country having 'toppled over' him), and it was his impression, Giles said, that he should be driving me over that identical road, but in the contrary direction, within the same period at latest.

'Uncle Theodore must be a very singular character,' I observed.

'He's just a Warlock,' was his reply; and not a word of further explanation could I elicit from Giles.

Burton Hawse was a compact farmhouse built of stone that was not at all likely to topple over, the walls being immensely thick and the windows let into them so as to form broad seats, which supplied the place of chairs, of which there was a great scarcity. The place had no doubt been originally built for defence, though that anybody should have ever wished to acquire it proved the grasping disposition of the heroes of the old border wars. Its position as regards the picturesque left nothing to be desired, the mountain view on all sides being splendid; but the only two sitting-rooms of which it boasted looked into the kailyard, and the sole elevation they commanded was the midden.

'Where no oxen are the crib is clean, but much increase is by the strength of the ox,' says the proverb, and judging from the state of that kailyard, which I had plenty of time to contemplate, I drew favourable auguries of the state of its owner's exchequer.

At last Uncle Theodore came in; an old man, of great height, but skeleton thinness, and with a fire in his eye that seemed to speak more of fever than vitality; he had a long white beard,

which, however, failed to impart its usual air of venerableness ; his expression was cynical, and when he was young and strong, had been probably truculent.

‘So you’ve come to try *your* luck with the childless old man, have you, Master Ned?’ was his first greeting. It would have been an embarrassing one enough in any case, but the harsh contemptuous laugh with which it was accompanied made it offensive in the highest degree.

I was not a bold rider, and a very poor performer at single-stick, but I was not without spirit ; the consciousness of mental superiority to everybody (called by a limited and unappreciating circle my ‘conceit’) had always sustained me.

‘Please to remember, sir,’ I answered quietly, ‘that though you are my uncle’ (here I heaved a sigh of genuine regret) ‘you are also my host.’

‘What the devil do you mean?’ he roared. I saw he knew what I meant quite well, and answered meekly, ‘Well, only that I have been here nearly an hour, and been offered nothing to eat.’

He laughed this time with some heartiness, and rang the bell for refreshments. Then he threw himself into a chair, and with his hands plunged into his breeches pockets, rattled his money, and stared at me with cunning looks, like a moulting raven.

He waited in silence till I had finished my repast, to which I did ample justice, but without hurrying myself, for I perceived that conciliation would be utterly thrown away upon him, and then with the curt invitation ‘Come out,’ he led the way into the farmyard.

We visited the pigs, and were received by them in the usual way ; I never could understand the satisfaction people seem to derive from calling upon these animals ; *porker-verba*—grunts—is the most you get out of them, and sometimes a great deal of rudeness. From these we went to the cows and the horses ; they looked round and then turned their backs upon us, just as they did in the south. I neither felt nor pretended to feel the slightest interest in any one of them. To do my Uncle Theodore justice, he seemed equally unmoved by their attractions.

‘You can ride any of those you like,’ he observed sententiously, when we had seen the last of them. I concluded he referred to the horses, though I should just as soon have thought of taking that liberty with the cows.

'Thank you, I never ride,' I replied.

'No more do I,' said Uncle Theodore.

Then we sauntered over the fields, both with our hands in our pockets, and looked over the sheep, and stopped at all the gates and looked over *them*, and chewed straws, and 'thought there would be a change in the weather presently,' and had a regular agricultural walk.

'You don't seem to care much about farming, Master Ned?' observed my uncle when we got home again.

'I hate it,' replied I, frankly.

'So do I,' said Uncle Theodore.

Next to having a taste—and especially an amusement—in common, the entertaining a common dislike for what other people admire, is the strongest bond of companionship; it has indeed one advantage over the former in affording no ground for disagreement. My uncle and I never disagreed about hunting, or shooting, or riding, or driving, or walking, because we detested them all. We used to sit for hours smoking our pipes in the garden in the sun, never interchanging a word, but thinking, no doubt (I can answer for myself at least) a good deal about one another. We got on very well together in a negative sort of way; and of course, though the life was very dull, this was a satisfaction to me. It was clear since my uncle neglected his farm that his money did not come from that source. I felt more convinced than ever that it was derived from maritime speculation—piracy. Such is indeed to this day my impression, though I have no proof of it, and it is fair to say that he had tastes and sentiments which seemed to have little to do with 'the Black Flag.'

'These broad acres,' my uncle observed to me one day, indicating with a sweep of his gaunt arm his extensive, but to say truth rather barren territory, 'have belonged to my race for three hundred years and more. Very few men can say that.'

'I have read of one man who could say it, however,' I answered drily, 'and who thought it an additional reason for selling them, since it was "high time they went out of the family."'

My uncle tapped the ashes out of his pipe, and with unconscious plagiarism observed, 'My sentiments to a hair! I bought back this ancestral domain in a moment of impulse, though in some respects it suits me. You have only seen one side of my character at present.'

I smiled a sickly smile; what I meant it to say was 'the

bright side, I am sure, Uncle Theodore,' but it was not a very successful performance, which as it turned out was lucky.

'Hitherto, Ned,' he continued, 'you have only beheld me as the Boor.'

I nodded. I ought to have shaken my head, but I had no time to reflect, and followed the dictates of nature.

'You have doubtless concluded from my sullen taciturnity that there was nothing in me, and little imagined that I was a far better scholar and greater student than yourself. You doubt me still, I see.' (It was not a question of doubt, but of distinct denial, though I took care to hold my tongue.) 'However, let that pass. The fact is, at first I mistrusted *you*. I thought your conceit and impertinence feigned, in order to arrive by a new route at the object in which others had failed. I now perceive that they are genuine and natural to your character. Nephew Ned, you are an honest man.'

Here he shook both my hands, as though to convince me that he was not paying me mere idle compliments, and drawing a huge key from the pocket of his shooting-jacket, invited me to follow him upstairs. At the top of the house there was a door belonging, as I had imagined, to some lumber room, since I had never seen anyone enter it, and into this apartment he led the way. The existence of such a room in such a house gave me little less astonishment than Blue Beard's chamber must have afforded to Fatima. It was lined with ancient books from floor to ceiling; from the latter, in place of a chandelier, hung a stuffed crocodile, and in one corner stood a human skeleton with an hourglass in its bony hand.

'You have never seen anything like this, my young friend,' he exclaimed with a boastful chuckle, and surveying the scene with all the arrogance of the collector.

'There is a print in Hogarth rather like it,' I replied in as indifferent a tone as I could muster, for the truth is I was rather frightened.

'Always honest; honest to the last,' he murmured admiringly. I didn't at all like that phrase 'to the last,' which if not absolutely superfluous seemed to have a very unpleasant significance. It began to strike me that my uncle, whom I knew to be shaky, was also cracked.

'I dare say, now,' he continued cunningly, 'you think I'm a conjuror or something of that sort?'

The position was most embarrassing; to say that I thought him 'no conjuror,' though perfectly true, might have aggravated him exceedingly, and to say I did think him one would be obviously unwelcome. I therefore took a middle course.

'I think you are only pretending to be a conjuror, Uncle Theodore.'

'Right again, Nephew Ned,' he exclaimed in high good-humour; 'and yet, can you believe it, there are fools about here who call me "the Warlock"?''

'Impossible!' I murmured, for of course I was not going to get the poor farm servant into trouble, without doing myself any good.

'They do,' he asserted confidently; 'I took a fancy one morning to put on my astrologer's robe and cast Giles's horoscope for him, and—such a little thing will set a rustic's tongue wagging!—he has believed me to be something uncanny ever since.'

This little incident was afterwards made the subject of dispute in a law court. It was absolutely adduced by those who denied my uncle's competence to make a will as a proof of his being out of his mind; but my advocate most ingeniously demonstrated that the flowing garment embroidered with stars was an ordinary dressing-gown, the black familiar (stuffed) upon his shoulder, the household cat, and the whole proceeding a well-intentioned though futile attempt upon my uncle's part to teach Giles the elements of Euclid.

'Here you see,' continued Uncle Theodore, pointing to the time-worn volumes around us, 'the text-books of the old magicians' trade. You have heard about Socrates, no doubt?'

I nodded; I had read about him at school in the *Memorabilia*, and was not likely to forget it.

'Now, what is your opinion about Socrates?'

Here, again, was an embarrassing position, but I have always held that when no happy idea suggests itself of evading a difficulty, it is better—and easier—to speak the truth.

'I believe him to have been a verbose old humbug,' I boldly replied; 'no person of genuine intelligence could have been so addicted to hair-splitting, or have put so many foolish questions.'

'Good boy; go to the top of the class,' continued my uncle approvingly. 'His pretence of keeping a demon in attendance upon him—though, it is true, out of livery—convinces me that he was ostentatious at bottom. I have always pursued my studies—as yet—without a demon.'

I did not feel quite so sure of that as I should like to have done. There was something uncommonly like manslaughter in my uncle's eye as he made the boast; and I thought those little words 'as yet' might just as well have been left unsaid.

'Here is another fellow,' continued my uncle, pointing disdainfully to a well-thumbed volume, 'whose vanity overshadowed an otherwise illustrious life—Empedocles. He travelled some way on his road to the Great Secret, yet when, in hopes to persuade the world he had discovered it, he threw himself into the volcano, he left his boots outside, and therefore deceived nobody.'

As it was evidently expected of me to say something, I murmured a few words about the force of habit, and his thinking, perhaps (for the moment), that he was going to bed. But my uncle shook his head.

'Cornelius Agrippa, yonder, went still further on the right track. We read that he was accustomed not to leave his room for weeks, and yet had such an accurate knowledge of everything that went on without, that it was supposed to be communicated to him by his dog. Now, what is your explanation of that very singular circumstance?'

'Well, upon my life, sir,' I answered in desperation, for it seemed to me—though upon reconsideration (when in the witness-box) I found reason (and good reason) to alter my opinion—that Uncle Theodore was getting very mad indeed. 'Upon my life, sir, I think it was a lie.'

'A lie,' repeated my uncle, frowning heavily; 'you mean, of course, as regards the dog.'

'I thought you were speaking of the dog, sir.'

'To be sure. "The dog it was that lied." Where does that line come from? You'd better be quick, *you dog*.'

Fortunately I *was* quick, and answered 'Goldsmith,' as though (to use the words of Mrs. Todgers' boy) someone had been behind me with a bradawl.

'Excellent youth,' cried my uncle, patting me on the head. The blandishment did not deceive me. I think—I mean I thought at the time—if there had been a moment of delay in my reply, he would have wrung my neck, or tried to wring it; I flatter myself he would have perished in the attempt, but what would have been the good of that, since (as I then surmised) he would have died intestate?

'Yes, Cornelius Agrippa was a good man. At the court of

the Elector of Saxony he was once requested by Erasmus to call up Plautus from the dead, and exhibit him as he appeared in garb and countenance, when grinding corn at his mill. As morbid a desire as was ever exhibited by any literary character. Is there any parallel to it, I ask you—quick ?

His impatience was frightful to witness.

‘Yes, sir, Mrs. Blimber, who thought she could have died happy if she could only have seen Cicero in his retirement at Tusculum.’

‘Good. I like a boy who is familiar with the ancient classics ; my own memory is not what it used to be, and I forget about Mrs. Blimber.—Those yonder are the works of Dr. Faustus ; it is my opinion that he was subject to illusions. He predicted his own death, however, with great accuracy, in which I have also been very successful—very. *What* do you say ?’

‘I said nothing, sir.’ (What *could* one say beyond an ejaculation ?)

‘But you said, “Oh !”’

‘And does not “O” stand for nothing, Uncle Theodore ?’

It was a poor jest (and not my own), but it saved me.

‘Here is the wisest and best of them,’ continued my uncle, taking a little volume from its shelf, and opening it with reverent hands ; ‘this is all that remains of Apollonius of Tyana. He was the nearest to the Great Secret. You remember his noble speech to the tyrant Domitian ?’

I nodded ; nobody can say that I told a lie about it.

“‘It is not for myself that I speak,’ he said ; ‘my soul is invulnerable to your enmity, and it is not given to you by the gods to become master of my body.’ *Whereupon,*” we read, “*he precipitately disappeared.*” Now, what do you think of *that* ?’

‘I think it was most sagacious of him ; I should have done it myself, sir, if I could.’

‘Quite right ; but in that reply you beg the whole question. You are young and strong, and should scorn to beg. The question is, with how much precipitancy did Apollonius of Tyana disappear ? Did he merely take to his heels, or vanish ? Upon this depends the answer to the momentous inquiry, “Did any of those necromancers and astrologers discover the Great Secret at all ?” For my part, I boldly answer “No.” That was a stroke reserved for the hand of Genius : the greatest of all geniuses. I need scarcely ask you who *that* is ?’

I wished that he had not asked me; I was in doubt, from his look of excessive complacency, whether he did not expect me to answer 'You;' but, on the whole, I thought it better and wiser to say 'Shakespeare.'

'Well, of course,' he answered, to my great relief. 'But who was the man who found out that Shakespeare had discovered it? *Here is the man!*'

He drew himself up to his full height and smote his breast triumphantly. 'I found it in that volume;' here he pointed to a copy of Shakespeare's works. 'I put it in that pot;' here he touched with his finger a jar of enamelled copper. 'And, after all, I'm afraid to touch a grain of it;' here he sat down on the floor, and burst into tears.

I was really sorry for him, and also sorry for myself, for it was clear, if poor Uncle Theodore continued in this state, that his testamentary intentions, however favourable to me and honourable to himself, would be valueless. Presently he got up, and with the observation, 'This is weakness,' held out his hand; before I could take it, however, he withdrew it. 'I was forgetting,' he said, 'the day of the week, and was about to say good-bye as if it was Friday instead of Monday. On Friday I am going away for a good long while. That is the date I have always fixed on for going away, in case I failed to find the secret. Ned, we shall meet again, and yet I cannot leave you my direction.'

'Mackworth Praed,' I said, with a smile of recognition.

'Yes; you are as fond of quotation as myself; it is your damnable trick of iteration that endears you to me. Moreover, like myself, you have failed in literature. Of course, I could have published on my own account, but I was never such a fool as *that*. I have written scores of MSS., and to-morrow I will begin reading them to you.'

I shuddered, but mustered up a smile.

'I know what pleasure it gives a person,' he added, 'to hear another person read his works aloud.'

'Then I will read you *my* MSS., Uncle Theodore,' I said good-humouredly.

'Good heavens, no!' he replied distastefully. 'If you had ever attempted such an outrage I would have left all my money to erect a golden statue of Shakespeare, to whom I have (almost) owed so much. As it is, since you are persevering, diligent, and easily satisfied (for you are satisfied with yourself, though you are

a total failure), I have left it all to *you*. Now we will go downstairs and have a cup of tea.'

He had recovered his usual manner, and seemed to expect that matters would go on in their ordinary course. But I had made up my mind to leave Burton Hawse on the first opportunity, and that that opportunity should occur the next morning. I was certain to get a letter from my mother by the first post, and in that letter, unless I was very much mistaken indeed, there would be, in her own handwriting—or something that would look very like it—an urgent summons for my return home. I was not going to be shut up with Don Quixote for another twenty-four hours.

I had made a favourable impression on him, it seemed, which would certainly not be improved by my behaviour as an audience of one to his proposed 'readings.' No human being with any self-respect could stand *them*. Moreover (though this, as it turned out, was a hasty judgment), it struck me that Uncle Theodore was as mad as a March hare, and the sooner he was left to his necromancers and his Great Secret the better—and safer.

My parents were not one whit more surprised to see me back again than if they had really summoned me home. My father had all along expressed his conviction that I should return on his hands, like a bad penny, and with no other addition to the family exchequer; it was not to be supposed, he argued, that Uncle Theodore would ever take to a lad who did not know a swede from a turnip—for no one but myself had the least idea of the nature of our mysterious relative's eccentricity. He had not taken any of my cousins into his confidence, nor did I think it necessary to enlighten my father upon the matter; a reticence upon which I had presently good cause to congratulate myself.

My dear mother only observed that she was sure I had done my best, and that it was not my fault that I had been dowered with a soul above mangel wurzel. Of course, she pumped me night and day with questions, and well it was that I had the faculty ('called by a much coarser name out of doors') of 'making the thing that is not as the thing that is.' Even as it was, however, she had her suspicions, and expressed her belief that there was some great secret somewhere in connection with Uncle Theodore—a remark that proved her sagacity, and that theory of heredity which asserts intelligence to descend (in greatly increased volume) from mother to son.

On Friday night we received news by telegraph that Uncle

Theodore was no more. I was greatly moved, partly by regret, for (though I had never liked him) he had behaved far from unkindly to me, but chiefly by the coincidence of date with that he had fixed upon for 'going away for a good long while;' I also remembered what he had said of 'having been very successful—very,' in predicting the day of his own decease. I had not the least doubt in my own mind of his having caused his prophecy to come to pass, and though I entertained the strongest hopes that he would prove a man of his word in other respects, concealed them. The observations of Dick, Tom, and Harry at the lugubriousness of my aspect were only what were to be expected. They wanted to know what was 'the good of it,' since it could never be reported in the proper quarter, and I was not thinking (they supposed) of going upon the stage. My mother said, 'Our dear Ned has a tender heart.'

'It may be lucky for him,' was my father's reply.

I regret to say that he hinted, though vaguely, at the last extremity to which famishing persons (who have refused to work for their own bread) have been occasionally reduced.

On Monday morning, when I got up much earlier than usual to meet the post, things wore a very different complexion. A letter arrived from a lawyer at Appleby apprising me that his esteemed client, the late Mr. Theodore Browne, had left all his property, real and personal, to his nephew Edward Browne, 'on account of his devotion to letters,' and summoning me to Burton Hawse to the funeral.

It was thus that I became wealthy through literature—though not I regret to say immediately. Uncle Theodore's property was so considerable as to incite certain members of his family—who had always opposed themselves to his will—to dispute it in a law court. Justice triumphed (except that the costs of the trial, for some absurd technical reason, had to be paid out of the estate), and eventually I came to my own; not only as regarded the mere money, but the esteem and admiration of all who knew me, with the trifling exception of my cousins.

My father veered round like the weathercock on our barn.

'Upon my life, Master Ned,' he said, with a quaint smile, 'you have proved a cleverer fellow than we took you for, and taken your pigs to a better market than any of us.'

It was the first compliment in connection with farming matters he had ever paid me, and I was greatly touched by it.

My dear mother confined herself to saying, 'This is almost more than I expected of you, my darling,' and a greater eulogium could hardly have been conferred upon me.

Now that I am lying here upon my bed it is a comfort to reflect that I behaved very handsomely to both those old people. They have long been dead, but I have not forgotten them; only just now my mind reverts more especially to Uncle Theodore. I never liked him, but he always interested me immensely—especially in his character of a Warlock. He evidently did not believe in any of those old magicians whose works must have cost him a pretty penny, but which, when I came to sell them, realised such very moderate prices; and yet he had as certainly got hold of *something* extraordinary, though not as it were by the right end. If he failed in discovering the Great Secret, he had at least found out that there was one. It was somehow, it seemed, connected with Shakespeare and a copper jar.

By-the-bye, where *was* that jar? It had come to me with all the other rubbish from Burton Hawse, but I had never even looked at it since. There had been observations made at that trial which were very unpleasant, and had caused everything connected with my uncle's hobby to be distasteful to me. I now remembered that the jar had been locked up in the cupboard in my dressing-room. A sudden desire seized me to investigate it; but how was I to get it? My nurse had taken it into her head that I was delirious, and if I was to ask for such an article, it would corroborate this absurd suspicion. I knew perfectly well that when she had hinted at my 'cunning,' she had referred to the simple yet ingenious devices which persons 'under control,' as it is delicately termed, make use of to obtain their ends. No sane man, of course, would dream of using such, but on the other hand, I wanted that jar.

'Nurse,' said I, in a faint voice, 'I think if I was left quite to myself for an hour or so, I could get a little sleep.'

She came to the foot of the bed and regarded me very sharply as I lay there, worn and weary, and with half-shut eyes. My ears, however, were as wide open as I could stretch them, and I caught quite distinctly what she was saying to herself: 'I wonder what he is after now?'

It was painful to think of such want of confidence in a fellow-creature, but it was clear that she suspected me of some artfulness.

‘A little sleep,’ I murmured faintly; ‘just a little sleep.’

She drew down the blind, arranged the curtains, put away the sock she had been mending—confound the woman, I thought she would have never done messing about—and at last shut the door behind her. I was out of bed like a sky-rocket, slipped into the next room, opened the cupboard, seized the jar, and had got it between the sheets with me, all within a couple of seconds. Pretty well, I think, for an invalid who, amongst his other ailments, was supposed to be suffering from acute bronchitis!

The jar was of blue enamel and rather pretty, and I thought to myself, ‘If I ever get better, I will keep tobacco in this.’ But there was something in it already which Uncle Theodore had put there; a black and shining substance, the oleaginous nature of which had doubtless kept it moist for so many years.

‘I found it in Shakespeare,’ were his words; ‘I put it in that pot, and now I am afraid to touch a grain of it.’ What had my revered relative the Warlock meant by *that*? I was not much of an agriculturist, as I have confessed, but I knew what a grain was, and there was not a grain of anything to be seen. Thinking how very mad Uncle Theodore must really have been, I was about to replace the lid, when I noticed a slip of paper pasted on the inside. A few words were written upon it very faintly, but which I made out with little difficulty. ‘The receipt: 1 Henry IV. II. 1.’ There was a pocket edition of Shakespeare in my dressing-room, and I added it to my little property under the bed-clothes in a twinkling. To read a book was strictly forbidden me, but surely one might verify a quotation. I looked out the passage with eager curiosity. ‘*We have the receipt of fernseed; we walk invisible.*’

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRANSFORMATION.

HERE, then, without doubt was the explanation of Uncle Theodore’s ‘fad’; his ‘Great Secret’ was the art of making oneself invisible, and he had flattered himself, though he had not had the courage to put it to the test, that he had really made the discovery. As to how he had made it, from that mere hint of Shakespeare’s, I knew nothing; the ingredients of the receipt were of course his own, and could be procured at pleasure, and he

had contented himself with concocting a mere sample of the composition.

It did not look like fernseed at all, but the seed had doubtless been powdered and reduced to paste. Of course the whole thing was absurd; but if, like Uncle Theodore, one had really believed there was something in it, it was natural enough that a man should pause before venturing on the experiment of tasting that paste. Suppose it did make one invisible, and one couldn't get visible again? I was very far (as will have been gathered from my account of myself), from being a conceited person; the last man in the world to wish to cut a figure in it, or to place myself *en évidence* (I had had enough of *that* in the witness-box); but still one prefers to preserve one's identity, and at all events not to be sat upon, or trampled under foot, through not presenting an object recognisable by the human eye. To have a voice in everything, where it was least expected, would be very enjoyable, but to be a voice and nothing more would be carrying spirituality much too far. Sooner or later, if one had nothing substantial to back it with, one's voice would be no more listened to than that of conscience itself when one has once discovered that one can do all sorts of naughty things with impunity.

The idea, I repeat, of there being any kind of magic in the thing was absurd; but still, it was not without a tremor that I took a teaspoon from the table at my bedside, dipped it into the jar, and put the contents into my mouth. The effect was most extraordinary. I felt at once as free as air. The nurse, as I have hinted, had entertained the monstrous theory that I was light-headed; but she might have said so now with justice. Every limb was as light as gossamer. It was possible that my opinion might still have had some weight with intelligent persons, but otherwise I was absolutely imponderous. The sense of levity was so strong upon me, that I actually shook the sheet in the expectation that the wind thus raised would carry me up to the ceiling; but I remained just where I was, and a good deal weakened by the exertion. Of course there was no reason why I should fly; Uncle Theodore had not said one word about flying; but I felt a little disappointed. What fun it would have been to be able to flutter about like a Japanese butterfly, and drop in on one's friends (from the ceiling) without hurting oneself? However, one can't expect everything, and that some great change had happened to me was certain.

I left my bed like a feather escaped from the ticking, and was wafted (no other word can express the lightness of my movements) to the pierglass. *It gave no reflection of me.* I knew that I was much emaciated by illness, and of course I had very little on, but still there was *something* of me to reflect, and here there was nothing. Just as when one gentleman wishes to ignore another, he will affect an interest in all other objects but his late friend, the mirror took the most minute note of the bed and window on either side of me, and of the fireplace behind me, but it remained totally oblivious of *me*. The situation was unparalleled. I had been occasionally cut by broken glass, but never before by a whole one. The wardrobe was highly polished, but that also refused to take the slightest notice of me. I pulled up the blind and exhibited myself at the window, where my airy apparel would certainly—for it was midday—have attracted, I thought, at least the attention of the spectator; a lady was passing by and she looked up, but it was only for an instant, and she hurried on. *It was clear that I was invisible!*

CHAPTER V.

THE ANTIDOTE.

It is impossible to depict the feelings with which this discovery overwhelmed me. In my early days, when I had dreams of a successful literary career, I had often imagined the waking up some fine morning 'and finding myself famous,' the cynosure of every eye; but the contrary of that position, the being imperceptible to human sight, had never entered into my mind. There was an excess of modesty about it, which, to say the truth, was not quite in keeping with my character. Even that well-known personification of seclusion, the violet by a mossy stone, was only *half* hidden from the eye; and just for the moment I confess it seemed to me that that retiring flower had so far the advantage of me. One talks about 'effacing oneself' for the benefit of others, but as a matter of fact it is never done, and I rather shrank from being made the first example of it. To 'make oneself scarce' is also a common phrase, but it implies that one is at some time or another to reappear, whereas, so far as I knew, I might have become so rare—or rarified—as never even

to rejoice the heart of a collector of curios, though he is satisfied with so little. It was strange, though only another proof of the Vanity of Human Wishes, that though I had attained the ideal of my expectations, and passed into a state of ethereal existence absolutely unknown out of a fairy tale, the most pressing question on my mind was how the deuce I was to get back again into my old 'form.'

That many novel experiences lay before me—and also a great deal of fun—was probable enough, but when I got tired of them, as I felt I should do, and wanted to be myself again, and to be recognised as such, for everyone desires that—*spectatum veniunt, veniunt spectentur ut ipsi*—how exceeding unpleasant it would be! I felt like an exceptionally nervous mouse, who having found its way into a trap full of good things, suddenly hears a little door fall behind him, and from that moment has no appetite for those too dearly bought dainties; he only wants to get out again. Nobody would pity me, for nobody could 'see anything' to pity in me. I was not 'an object' even for charity—but I intensely pitied myself. A good deal of sympathy has been wasted upon the man without a shadow, but to compare my case with his would be to compare the shadow with the substance. One might have said that he was literally 'nowhere' in the comparison, had not that been so much more my condition than his. However, as there was nothing to be done, and feeling uncommonly cold about the legs, I got into bed again, as being at least a more convenient place for reviewing my position.

When the nurse came back it was clear that there would be a row. A woman can explain almost anything to her own satisfaction, but how would she account to her superiors for the absence of her patient? There was to be a consultation upon my case that very day between Sir Lucas Lucca, a man of European reputation, and Mr. Scratchwig (the great specialist on the cerebellum); but eminent as were their talents, they could hardly prescribe for an invalid without seeing him. Would it be better, I wondered, to speak to the nurse or not? She had a good deal of presence of mind, and might get over my absence of body under the (unfortunately mistaken) idea of its being temporary, but if I was to say I was there, when I was not, it might be the death of her. It was a satisfaction of course to feel that I had not lost my consideration for others, but that, alas, was not a material reflection, which was what I wanted.

And now—it was very strange, considering my apprehensions for the future, though we all know how little *those* move us when we have the toothache, or an inverted eyelash, to distract our thoughts from them—I became conscious of a most unpleasant taste in my mouth; that receipt of Uncle Theodore's, as is the case with most medicines of great power, was exceedingly nasty. There was a sugar basin on my bed table, and I took a lump, which nearly choked me—for at that instant the dressing-room door opened.

It was of course the nurse, and I heard her say 'Drat him, if he hasn't been out of bed, and pulled the blind up,' in a grumpy undertone. I felt, however, no anger against the poor woman, but only thought of the terrible surprise that was awaiting her. She stood in the doorway between the two rooms, and stared at me, with an expression of countenance I had never seen her wear before.

'I really think, Mr. Browne,' she said, in a tone of dignified reproof, 'that you had better cover yourself up a little more.'

Suffused with blushes, I dived under the bedclothes.

'In your state of health,' she continued in a mollified tone, 'you should be very particular not to run the chance of catching cold.'

I knew that of course, but as far as *she* was concerned, I had thought it did not signify twopence whether I was out of bed or in. How grateful I felt to that excellent woman for her censure no tongue can tell, *for it convinced me that I was not invisible.*

Indeed I had now become conscious of having recovered my density as suddenly as I had lost it. But how had I accomplished this? I looked again very carefully at the words written on the lid of the jar, and after the 'Henry IV. II. 1,' I thought I could make out with infinite difficulty the figures IV. II. They were much fainter than the others; the light through the sheets was not adapted for such investigations, and of course I dared not let the nurse see what I was about. Then I turned to the place indicated in the play and continued to read through the whole scene. Never surely was the verification of quotation attended with such difficulties, and when I had finished nothing came of it. It was the scene in which Prince Hal proposes to chaff the waiter, and there was nothing in it about fernseed. True, but there were two references (which seemed almost as much out of place) to sugar.

This has much puzzled the commentators, none of whom had

at that time discovered that all Shakespeare is a cryptogram devised to save his Bacon. To what end did the waiter give him the sugar? asks the Prince. And well may he ask it. Nobody knows—except me. It was not a mere compliment, as most people think; it was the complement of the receipt for fernseed. The taking of that lump of sugar had given me body again, and would probably always do so.

‘There’s plenty sugar somewhere in the world,’ sings somebody, and as a matter of fact it can be got at every grocer’s. It gives one gout, they say, but that would be merely another item added to my complication of ailments, and such a risk was nothing in comparison with the one I had so lately hazarded with so light a heart. I had not only discovered the Great Secret, but how to use it; the way in and the way out. My dear mother was right in always thinking me such a very clever fellow. I was not a conceited man, but one can’t get over facts, even when they tell in one’s own favour, and I felt that Newton himself (to use a sporting expression of my cousin Dick’s) was ‘not in it’ when compared with me. He had discovered the theory of gravity, but I had discovered the theory of *Levity and Gravity*—and also the practice—in less than five minutes!

CHAPTER VI.

THE CONSULTATION.

‘The doctors will be here directly,’ observed the nurse, ‘but I shall not say anything about your having been out of bed.’ She spoke in a most gracious tone, but it did not deceive *me*; I knew that it was for her own sake that she was going to be so reticent, and replied with a demure wink. This obviously alarmed her. I thought it a good opportunity for making terms with her, for, so to speak, getting leave of absence in case I should have a fancy for experimentalising with the Secret.

‘I shall hold my tongue,’ I said, ‘if you hold yours; let *mum* be the word for both of us. When I go away from here, I don’t want you to miss me.’

‘Oh dear me, Mr. Browne, but we should all do that,’ she answered, with a little break in her voice intended for pathos (she could put that ‘break’ on at pleasure).

'Nobody will miss me except you,' said I severely, 'or at all events not so much.'

This silenced her, and though I was not quite sure she had understood my meaning, I thought it best to close the subject.

Presently the doctors came upstairs, and sent the nurse away.

Sir Lucas Lucca took up his station on one side of the bed, and Mr. Scratchwig on the other. Sir Lucas was a tall and portly gentleman, with a voice of honey, and eyes that glowed through his gold-rimmed glasses with a sort of moonlight benevolence. Mr. Scratchwig was short and thin, with the voice of a nutmeg-grater and eyes like gimlets. They asked me questions, to which I answered nothing. It was their business—for which they were to get three guineas apiece—to say what was the matter with me, and not mine. They pounded me about, and tortured me a good deal, but I remained obstinately mute.

'You are better, sir,' exclaimed Mr. Scratchwig sharply. His tone was so very menacing, and his genius in finding out I was better (when he had never seen me before) impressed me so vividly, that I could keep silence no longer; still I was not going to agree with him.

'I'm worse,' I murmured faintly.

'You *think* so,' said Sir Lucas, with a heavenly smile. 'That's a good sign, my dear sir.'

It was obviously useless to converse with learned persons of this sort any more; and I didn't.

They left the room to talk over my case together in the next apartment, and a passionate desire seized me to make a third in their consultation. I swallowed a spoonful of the magic mixture, and floated in after them like swansdown; an instant later, and I should have been smashed like a periwinkle in the closing door; as it was, my nightgown was shut in it, and imprisoned me. Here was a position! Though I could not be seen, it was evident that I was not impalpable as I had supposed. When they left the room they would find me out, though only to a certain extent, and in quite a different sense from what would be the experience of the nurse. I softly opened the door and set myself free.

'These houses are very badly built,' observed Mr. Scratchwig, closing it with a bang.

'A pretty room, too,' observed Sir Lucas sweetly; 'nice pictures these—very nice.'

He was examining the works of art that hung on the walls

through his gold-rimmed glasses. 'Our patient yonder had some taste.'

What did he mean by 'had,' confound him? I had as much taste as ever, and was sorry for it, for I had swallowed a larger quantity of the mixture than before; and of course, if I had brought any sugar, which I had had no time to do, I dared not have taken it.

'This is Windermere,' he went on complacently. 'You know the Lakes, of course, Scratchwig? A lovely district!'

'Devilish damp though,' observed the other. 'That's where I caught my cold last year. I hate a cold.'

'I suffer from colds myself,' said Sir Lucas sympathetically. 'My bronchial tubes are easily affected. If these east winds continue I shall run down to some warm place or another for a day or two.'

'I thought you always sent your people to cold places, above the snow-line, for their bronchial tubes.'

'Patients, patients,' said Sir Lucas softly, as though he were saying, 'Don't let us hurry.'

'To be sure, that's different. They are safe to come back to you, are they not? except——'

Here the other coughed so loudly that I lost the conclusion of the sentence, to which, nevertheless, Sir Lucas seemed to address his reply.

'By-the-bye,' he said, 'that reminds me of the case of our friend next door.'

It was about time that something did; for hitherto, though these learned gentlemen had talked of their own ailments, they had not said one word about mine.

'We know, of course, what our friend Jones thinks about it,' continued Sir Lucas.

'Ought to be here,' growled Mr. Scratchwig.

'Well, no doubt; but this I will say for Jones, that directly a case becomes difficult, he hands it over to somebody else. "Responsibility Jones," we used to call him, you remember, because he would never take any.'

'Quite right too,' observed Mr. Scratchwig; 'lucky for him.'

This eulogium upon my own medical adviser was not very gratifying, but I was much too angry upon my own account to think of Jones.

'And now about Mr. What's-his-name—yes, Browne,' said Sir

Lucas, with the cheerful air of a man who finds his memory as good as ever. 'An interesting case.'

'Scarcely in *your* sense,' smiled Mr. Scratchwig.

It was rather a personal pleasantry, for Sir Lucas had been at one time a fashionable accoucheur, and had brought as many persons into the world as he had sent out of it. He now restricted his attentions in that line to Princesses only, and eschewed in a general way that branch of the medical business. He not only ignored the other's observation, but there was a perceptible diminution of blandness in his tone, as he continued, 'I am inclined to think Jones's view of this matter is the right one, Mr. Scratchwig.'

'You have anticipated what I was about to say myself, Sir Lucas,' said the other with obsequious acquiescence; he was making haste, it was clear, to atone for his little mistake. Apology, however, of any kind was distasteful to his nature, and the necessity for it (for on no other ground can I explain what followed) had soured him. 'The probable issue of this affair is not altogether to be deplored,' he continued. 'A narrow and sullen nature. Did you happen to observe the expression of his eye?'

It was fortunate that Mr. Scratchwig could not see it at that moment, or the fact that I shook my fist within half an inch of his nose.

'I saw it,' said Sir Lucas, smiling. 'It is one of those cases where one would rather be the doctor than the nurse.'

'Very good, very good!' cried Mr. Scratchwig. 'How I envy you that admirable quality of always saying the right thing in the right place! However, it won't last long—I mean as regards Mr. B.,' he added precipitately.

And this was the man who had said, 'You are better, sir,' and insisted upon it!

'We had better say, I suppose, "the same treatment"?' observed Sir Lucas. 'It can't signify much, and it would be only fair to Jones.'

'By all means; the same treatment, unless there are more complications, though that there can scarcely be. You seem to be very sweet upon that Windermere, Sir Lucas.'

The great physician was again regarding it through his glasses. 'Yes; do you know anything about the disposal of the property; the pictures, for example? Are they likely to be in the market?'

'I'll ask Jones, and drop you word,' said Mr. Scratchwig.

Here there was a knock at the door, and an agitated voice without cried, 'Gentlemen! good gentlemen!'

'Just what I expected,' observed Mr. Scratchwig; 'he's beyond control.'

This was not quite the case, though I was certainly extremely impatient to get back to my room without, so to speak, a row. I opened the door, which they thought the nurse did, and the nurse thought they did, and slipping past her, was in my bed and had swallowed a lump of sugar in half a second. While I was 'putting flesh on,' as the prizefighters say, or (more scientifically) changing from what was of no parts and no magnitude to a solid, I listened to what was being said outside. 'Good gentlemen, he's gone!' sobbed the nurse.

'Well, well, we must all go,' said Sir Lucas, consolingly. (He was thinking of how he should possess himself of that picture of Windermere, I *knew*.)

'He ought not to have done that,' said Mr. Scratchwig, severely; 'I had given him ten days.'

'But you don't understand, gentlemen,' exclaimed the nurse; 'he's not dead, but fled, and nobody knows where he's got to.'

This brought them both into the room at once, where they found me lying (literally enough) in bed, gazing at the ceiling with a placid smile.

'Why, he's got back again!' cried the nurse; 'well I never!'

'At all events, I hope not often,' said Sir Lucas, rebukefully. The two doctors exchanged significant looks.

'You're wrong,' said I, 'both of you. It isn't that.'

'It isn't *what*?' gasped Sir Lucas.

'It isn't drink, as you think. She's a total abstainer.'

The poor nurse cast a grateful look at me (for she did like her sherry at meals), and began to whimper.

'You are overwrought, my good woman,' said Sir Lucas kindly. 'It's a very trying case for you, as we have just been admitting.'

'She's going the same way as he is,' whispered Mr. Scratchwig, confidentially. 'It often happens when the cerebella are sympathetic.'

'Good heavens! what, both of 'em?' murmured Sir Lucas in tones of unconcealed alarm.

Mr. Scratchwig nodded. 'It may be only temporary; but it

is a clear case of delusion. Look here,' he said, turning to the nurse, 'you're a cup too low, and I advise you to take a little stimulant.' ('When we're gone,' put in Sir Lucas, hastily.) 'A glass of sherry or two with your meals won't hurt you.'

I nodded. Scratchwig was right there; they never *had* hurt her.

'There, you see, Mr. Browne agrees with me,' he continued, sardonically. 'We've nothing to say against you, nurse, I assure you. You are not so used to these little affairs as I am.' Then dropping his voice (but *I* heard him), he added, 'You mustn't be alarmed if you lose your patient occasionally. I have no doubt he got between the mattresses. Very likely he'll swarm up the chimney some day. They're very cunning. Come, Sir Lucas, I think we have done all that can be done—humanly speaking—for our patient to-day.' And off they went.

(*To be continued.*)

THE GRAND TOUR.

IN these days of rapid locomotion, travelling on the Continent is a thing so easy and so common that it is sometimes difficult to realise what it must have been before the introduction of steam packets and railways. In those times it was a very serious business, involving a vast amount of forethought and preparation. Instead of buying a circular ticket and taking your choice of half a dozen Continental trains in the day, your first care was to buy a carriage—generally a berlin—built in the strongest fashion, in order to stand the wear and tear of the foreign roads. It is true that, if buying a carriage was beyond your means, you might place yourself in the hands of one of two enterprising firms—either that of Déjean or that of Emery—whose carriages set out ‘almost every week’ from London to various parts of the Continent. This was at the time when the abdication of Napoleon had once more rendered Europe accessible to the English traveller. Finally, you could go by coach to Dover, and resume your journey on the other side of the Channel by diligence. But the standard guide-books of the period insist strongly on the advantages of travelling in your own carriage, ‘going post through France, and, generally speaking, *en voiturier* in Switzerland and Italy.’

Those were the days when passports were matters of absolute necessity everywhere, and when the neglect to have them *viséd* by the proper authorities might entail an enormous delay, if not more serious inconvenience. You got your passport by giving ‘a trifling gratuity to the minister’s porter.’ Having got this, you next thought of your outfit. The carriage had to be fitted up. To judge by the catalogue of things you were recommended to take with you, it must have been very like the van of a travelling salesman. To give the entire list would take up too much space; it will be sufficient to mention a few of the more conspicuous articles. You were advised to take your own bedding and pillows, together with the necessary linen. In somewhat startling contrast to the completeness of this arrangement is the recommendation to take ‘a pocket-knife to eat with.’ Pistols were a *sine quâ non*. Less intelligible are the ‘leather sheets,’ without which no traveller was to think of starting. A medicine chest, containing

enough drugs to stock a small chemist's shop, was deemed absolutely essential. These are but a few of the articles with which the man who then dared to contemplate a Continental journey was bidden to provide himself. The list closes with a mysterious item—a peculiar and apparently very precious oil, called 'anti-friction oil,' at that time only to be procured in London, though chiefly used and required on the Continent. It seems to have been very costly, but to what extent it really smoothed the poor traveller's way is not apparent. That something of the kind was wanted is, however, only too sadly evident; for in Bohemia, for example, in the vicinity of Prague, the roads were at that time so 'rocky' that heavy carriages were broken to pieces, and, out of one party that ventured upon them on their way to Dresden, 'two of the travellers broke bloodvessels in consequence, whilst the others were overturned and nearly killed with fatigue.' When the roads were not too hard, they had the uncomfortable habit of being too soft, that is, 'so boggy that the lightest vehicle could hardly escape overturning unless held up by men.' Hence what sounds to us the somewhat bold and startling recommendation that invalids, especially consumptive patients, should not attempt to travel except on horseback! How a modern invalid would stare at such a piece of advice!

Provided with passport, carriage, and outfit, the traveller, accompanied by his body-servant, and possibly by a courier—but the courier is not recommended—posted to Dover. There was at that time a boat to Calais four times a week, though English letters were delivered in Paris only twice a week. If Calais did not suit him, there was a boat to Ostend once a week. Finally, he might, if it so pleased him, hire a cutter to Calais for eight guineas. The fare to Calais for a passenger alone was then half-a-guinea, and to Ostend a sovereign. In every case, however, the passenger was expected to present the mariners with a gratuity. The gratuity is described as 'trifling,' but it was probably as much as the fare. In fact, 'trifling' seems as inseparable from 'gratuity' as 'little' is from 'bill.'

But the great business—and no wonder—was with the carriage. It was eagerly waited for and rapaciously pounced upon at Calais. It had, first of all, to be valued; and we may be sure that in the valuation every regard was shown to the owner's feelings, if not to his purse. When it had been thus generously valued, a third of the amount had to be deposited with the custom-house

officials. Such a carriage might easily have been estimated at 300%. The traveller would then have had to hand over 100% as a kind of entrance-fee on making his appearance on French soil. It is true the money was only 'deposited,' but money, once deposited, is apt, like fallen seed, to take root. Under no circumstances could this sum ever be recovered intact. If the traveller returned within the year, he was entitled to recover two-thirds of it. But, if he honoured France with his presence for three years, he lost the whole of it. This was the 'ransom of property' in those days, and certainly a magnificent example of direct taxation.

After this, there must have seemed something tame and paltry in the duty which had still to be paid of twenty francs on each carriage, and the clearance fees of forty francs, which, being paid generally through an hotel servant, involved a 'trifling gratuity' of ten francs in addition to that individual.

Supposing the traveller not to have brought his own carriage, he might hire one at Calais to take him to Paris for five napoleons; this carriage would remain at his disposal for fifteen days. Or, if he preferred to go by diligence, he might of course do so. In this case the expense from London to Paris was about five pounds; but the traveller was limited to fourteen pounds in the way of luggage.

Arrived in Paris, the great thing was to know to what hotel to go. The proprietors of the great hotels had an objection to receive passengers by the day. Moreover, there were but few of the hotels at which you could get good meals. As regards prices, they do not seem to have altered very materially. Perhaps they were a little cheaper then than now. Tea was, of course, much dearer. A cup of tea at the *déjeuner* sometimes sufficed to treble the cost of that meal. In the provinces the price of dinner varied from three to six francs a head. But these provincial inns had their drawbacks. Many are described as places where a tolerable meal could be got, but where it was impossible to sleep. The description of even a large town sometimes ends with the significant words, 'not a sleeping-place.' And even at the inns where the food was tolerable, the environment was by no means always pleasant. If the palate was agreeably titillated, the nose was too often outraged. The sanitary reformer had not then appeared upon the scene, and the 'germ,' still undiscovered, wantoned at its will. One of the best inns on the Continent is thus gently stigmatised: 'The charges are moderate, the dinners well served,

but the smells in this house render it unpleasant.' It is noteworthy that there is no suggestion that the house may have been unhealthy also. It was a mere matter of taste, after all. The Britons of those days had no notion of allowing themselves to be injured by a mere evil odour. That idea came in with a sicklier and more nervous generation.

But if the French inns were bad enough, the German were worse. The traditions of the country in this respect were bad, and it almost seems as if nothing less than a railway can paralyse a tradition. How complete the isolation of villages, and even towns, could be in the days before the railway—how little people knew of their own country, or even of their own neighbourhood—is attested by many startling facts. For instance, it is stated in all seriousness, that Chamouni—that focus for travellers in Switzerland—was *discovered* in 1741. The happy discoverers were two Englishmen, Messrs. Windham and Pocock, and at that time even the inhabitants of Geneva, only eighteen leagues distant, had never so much as heard of it. Such complete isolation was, of course, very favourable to the survival of the unfittest. In some parts of Germany the inns were in many respects but little better than those so graphically described in 'The Cloister and the Hearth.' A traveller, writing in 1820, tells us that 'the Germans seldom have a wash-hand basin in any of their country inns, and even at Villach, a large town, we could not find one.' Even nowadays the English traveller—insular and semi-aquatic as he is—is apt to grumble at the exiguity of the washing apparatus provided for him in foreign parts; but the railway has at least rendered impossible the dismal spectacle of a whole town without a wash-hand basin.

One evil tradition has survived to the present day. The German beds have always been at once a trial and a mystery. That a race by no means short should delight in stunted bedsteads has puzzled many a French and English traveller in the Fatherland. Not less mysterious is the narrowness of the bedstead. When one compares the figures of the more substantial burghers of a German town with the receptacle provided for their accommodation at night, no effort of the imagination will make them conterminous; it is certain that the flesh must overlap the feathers. Then the bedclothes are a trial, consisting, as they do in summer, of a blanket with a sheet buttoned to its under surface, in winter, of an eider-down quilt enclosed in a cotton bag. Neither can be

tucked in or secured in any way, and only a born Teuton knows the art of retaining them in position. Most mysterious of all is the triangular section of a mattress which is placed at the head of the bed, and which forms, perhaps, the most effectual obstacle to the repose of a foreigner.

All this seems to have been much the same in the days before the railway. A traveller thus naïvely describes and explains the German beds in 1820. 'Tall people cannot sleep comfortably in any part of Germany; the beds, which are very narrow, being placed in wooden frames or boxes, so short that any person who happens to be above five feet high must absolutely sit up all night supported by pillows, and this is, in fact, the way in which the Germans sleep.'

Doubtless his explanation is the correct one; but those who are not accustomed to sleep in a sedentary posture can rest in such a bed at all only by assuming the shape of the last letter of the alphabet.

The German provisions are described as good, but they could not be eaten with much comfort, as clean table-linen was almost impossible to procure anywhere. Nor was this to be wondered at, as things were usually washed only once a quarter. To the present day the sheets are sometimes sewn on the blankets, which would hardly be done unless they were destined to a long career of usefulness.

One of the great bugbears of travellers has always been the custom-house. With hand as impartial as the foot of Death, the *douanier* knocks at the trunk and valise alike of peer and peasant. He never seems to discharge his task to the satisfaction of anyone but himself; he seldom discovers anything contraband. It is a Sisyphus-like task, which is for ever beginning anew, and leading to no result. Hence his proverbial ill-temper; hence the ruthless way in which he violates the profoundest sanctities of your portmanteau. He has always been essentially the same, but in former times it was easier than now for the traveller to throw dust in his eyes—gold dust, of course. When the *milord Anglais*, travelling in his berlin, passed the barrier of a frontier town, the *douanier* followed his carriage to the hotel, and examined the baggage there. This was a very comfortable arrangement, and could generally be made more comfortable still through the payment of a trifling fee. Sometimes half-a-crown would suffice to save the baggage of a whole family from profanation. More often,

five shillings or even more was expected. But occasionally things were made worse for the unlucky traveller than they ever can be now. The custom-house official was not bound to follow the traveller to his hotel. If he stood upon his strict rights, he could examine the baggage in the open street, and sometimes he did so. In this case he did not speculate upon a gratuity; he laid himself out for actual plunder. When every box and parcel and package should have been taken out of the berlin, and every article which they contained strewed upon the road, it would be hard indeed if he did not manage to secure some modest pickings for himself—especially if the examination took place, as it often did, by lamplight. 'It needed,' says one traveller, who underwent this exhaustive process, 'Argus-eyes not to be plundered of everything valuable our trunks contained, and herculean strength to unpack and repack after the fatigue of a twelve hours' journey. It was a great object of the custom-house officials to thief, for which purpose they endeavoured to throw small parcels on the ground under the carriage, and even examined coach seats, writing boxes, and letters. They seized gold and silver lace, snuff, and tobacco. They would accept no fees, and were slower in their operations than it is possible to conceive.'

A few miscellaneous items of intelligence recorded for the benefit of travellers in 1820 may not be without their interest for the more fortunate travellers in 1887. At that time the passenger by diligence from Paris to Brussels had to sleep two nights on the road. The fare for this journey, viz. seventy francs, does not seem exorbitant, especially when we bear in mind that it included bed and board *en route*. It is true that for this payment you had no right to a separate chamber; there might even be several beds in it; but an extra fee would generally secure privacy. And the waiter expected only six sous as a *pourboire*. Where are such waiters nowadays?

From London to Geneva, including dinners, suppers, and beds on the road, the fare was not far short of twenty pounds, whilst the fare to Florence was about thirty-five. Fares by sea were perhaps not higher than now in proportion to the time taken on the voyage. Thus from Falmouth to Gibraltar the fare was 38*l.*, to Malta 59*l.*, to Messina, 61*l.* But passengers had to provide their own bedding, and there was no reduction in the fares for female servants. The packets sailed 'every three weeks, weather permitting.' From Hamburg to Harwich every 'whole passenger' paid

five pounds; every 'half-passenger' three. Here, again, female servants were counted as 'whole passengers,' as also were all children over six years of age.

In 1820 the height of Mont Blanc was known only approximately; but it was estimated by one authority at 15,303 feet. The woods of Chamouni abounded with rabbits, white hares, martens, and ermines, the rocks with marmots and chamois. There were two inns there, neither of which was more than tolerable.

At that time every town of importance had its gates, which were closed during the night. The gates of Geneva were opened at 5 A.M. and shut at 10 P.M. The belated traveller was often refused admittance, and had to content himself with the accommodation of some wayside pothouse. Then, as now, Russia was the most difficult country to get into or to escape from. But whereas secrecy is now the pride of the police, publicity was then their practice. The shy and shrinking foreigner who had found his way thither and desired to get home again had notoriety thrust upon him; he could not leave the country until his name had been advertised in full three times in the Gazette. It was a parody of the publication of banns, only in this case as the preliminary, not to marriage, but to a divorce from the soil of Russia.

Considering the number of disbanded soldiers with whom the cessation of the Napoleonic wars must have encumbered Europe, travelling in those days seems to have been remarkably safe. Only in Italy is there a hint of danger. The confines of the Roman and the Neapolitan territories were certainly infested with bandits. Even the guide books, whose *raison d'être* it was to encourage travel, could not deny this. But they extenuated it in a curious way. These knights of the road were, after all, not so much banditti as patriots. They were in fact a nation, the inhabitants of Abruzzo, who plundered, not because they had no other means of subsistence, but because they considered it a national duty. It is not easy to see how this nice distinction could benefit the traveller. Few men, even in our day, have developed the altruistic spirit to such an extent as to enable them to bear cheerfully the spoiling of their goods, provided the spoilers have some noble object in view.

However, except in certain districts of Italy, the Continent seems to have been tolerably free from the more open kind of robbers. But there are warnings enough against the cheat and

the peculator. For instance, the traveller was warned that in Tuscany the man who sold asses' milk was in the habit of selling his customers also by carrying under his cloak a bottle filled with hot water, some of which he contrived to mix with the milk so expertly that it was difficult to detect him. Alas! *mutatis mutandis, de nobis fabula narratur!*

Another warning of a different kind has reference to the Neapolitan churches. Few of these could then be entered with any comfort, as the Neapolitans were accustomed to throw the bodies of the dead, without coffins, into the vaults beneath the churches. Nor did they trouble themselves about such a trivial detail as cementing the pavements of the churches. The consequence was an effluvium which even the sacred character of the edifice could not transform into the odour of sanctity.

The Pope of those days had a fancy for the English. Pio Nono was also said to favour them, especially those of the fairer sex. But the etiquette of his Court was in one respect the very opposite to that of England. Even the British Matron, when she goes to Court, must in her own person furnish a slight example of what she so rigorously condemns on the walls of the Academy. The right place for her would be the Court of Rome; for there the rule was, and is, that no lady can be presented to the Pope unless she wears a dress coming up to the throat. *Humanum est errare*; and it is well that even popes should be kept as free as possible from temptation.

Berlin has always been famous, since the days of Frederick the Great, for the strictness of its discipline; but it seems odd to read that in 1820 the prices at the hotels were regulated by Government. This no doubt was in the interest of the public, and even as a mere reminiscence of the past, it excites a feeling akin to gratitude. Nor was this all. The public will have *circenses* as well as *panes*, and the Berlin Government provided the former absolutely free. All for whom there was room were admitted to the Italian Opera without charge, the second and third rows of boxes being reserved for foreigners.

No doubt in those days foreigners were as a class a good deal more select than they are now. Every travelling Englishman was a lord, actual or potential. In Austria, even in the present day, a very trifling outlay of ready money will ensure your being addressed as 'Herr Graf' or 'Euer Gnaden.' But in 1820 almost every travelling Englishman was really rich, and deserved and

received the consideration always shown to wealth. One curious evidence is to be found in the fact that, when milord arrived in certain towns, it was usual for the town band to assemble and honour him with a serenade. And as late as 1850 it was the custom to salute the guests approaching Karlsbad with a grand flourish of trumpets from the Stadtthurm.

Alas! *nous avons changé tout cela*. Travellers are now too numerous, and time is too precious, to give them the honours that were formerly their due. The era of ceremony and inconvenience has given place to an era of comfort and nonchalance. Who shall adjust the balance of comparative advantage? Probably our grandfathers, if they suffered more, also gained more from their foreign travels. We sit at ease in the first-class carriage of a through express, and instead of studying a country, glimpse a panorama. The Grand Tour was an education; our Continental 'outings' leave but little mark upon our characters.

MR. SANDFORD.

IV.

MR. SANDFORD knew nothing till he found himself in the Regent's Park, not far from his house. He had passed through the crowds in the street with his life and thoughts suspended, feeling that to think was impossible, seeing only before him the line of the three pictures standing against the wall. They seemed to accompany him on his way, showing against the front of the houses wherever he turned his eyes. Three pictures, painted cheerfully, without a premonition, or any sense of failure, or a moment's fear that they would ever stand with their faces against a dealer's wall. One of them had been a great favourite with his wife. The youngest girl—little Mary—had sat for one of the figures, and Mrs. Sandford had not wished to let it go. 'I wish we could afford to keep this,' she said; 'it is like selling our own flesh and blood.' But most painters have to accustom themselves to that small trouble, and even she had laughed at herself. And now to think that it had never been sold at all—that it was unsaleable—oh, heaven! The sense of a dreadful humiliation, far more than was reasonable, filled the painter's mind. The man whom he had always liked, but partly despised—Daniells, who was as ignorant as a pig, who knew a picture indeed when he saw it, but had not a notion why he liked it, nor could render a reason or tell how he knew one to be bad or another good—that he should be losing by his kindness, should be out of pocket, burdened by three 'Sandfords' with their faces against the wall! Mr. Sandford's gentle contempt came back upon him with a shock of humiliation and shame. To sneer at a man who had suffered by him, who had given money for his unsaleable work—a man who had thus shown himself a better man than he: for Daniells had never said a word, probably never would have said a word, listened to the painter's calm assumptions and taken no notice, having it in his power all the time to shame him! Nay, he had done even more than this—he had brought his own customer out of his way, in pity and friendship, to buy that 'Black Prince,' no doubt equally unsaleable, though—heaven help the poor painter!—he had not found it out. The pang of this humiliation, mingled with tingling shame and a painful

gratitude and admiration, quivered through and through him, penetrating the dark dismay and pain of his suspended thoughts.

He came to notice everything better when he got into the park. The August afternoon was softening every moment into the deeper sweetness of the evening. He avoided instinctively the frequented parts, where the children were playing and people walking about, and made a long circuit round the outskirts of the park, where only a rare passenger was to be met with now and then. The air was sweet, though it was the air of town. The leaves were fluttering in a light breeze, the birds singing their evening songs, thrushes repeating a hundred questions, blackbirds unconditional, piping loud and clear, almost as good as nightingales. He was a man who was not hard to please, and even Regent's Park delighted him on a summer evening. He felt it even now, notwithstanding the shadow that was over him. Never, up to this time, had care hung so heavy on Mr. Sandford but what he could escape from it by help of the artist-eye, ever ready to seize a passing effect, or by the gentle heart which was full of sympathy with every human emotion or even whim of passing fancy. His heart was unaccustomed to anything tragical. It tried even now to beguile him and escape; to withdraw his attention to the long, streaming, level rays of the sinking sun; to get him out of himself to the aid of the child who had broken its toy and was crying with such passion—far more than a man can show for losses the most terrible—by the side of the road. And these expedients answered for the moment. But what had befallen him now was not to be eluded as other troubles had been. He could not escape from it. The most ingenious imagination could not lessen it by turning it over and over. Behind the sunset rays a strange vision of the unsold pictures came out into the very sky. They shaped themselves behind the child, whom it was so easy to pacify with a shilling, against the park palings. Three—which was one of the complete numbers, as if to prove the fulness of the disaster—three pictures unsold in Daniells' inner room, and not a commission in hand, nothing wanted from him, no one to buy. After thus trying every device to escape, his heart grew low and faint within him, giving up the conflict; he felt a dull buzzing in his ears, and a dull throbbing in his breast.

But thinking was not so easy a matter as it seemed. Think it over? How was he to think it over? If it were possible to imagine the case of a man who, walking serenely over a wide and

peaceful country, suddenly, with the softest, scarcely audible, roll of the pebbles under his feet, sees the earth yawn before him and finds himself on the brink of a fearful precipice, that would have been like his case: but not so bad as his case, for the man would have it in his power to draw back, to retire to the peaceful fields behind: whereas, to Mr. Sandford, there were no peaceful fields, but a gulf all round that one spot of undermined earth on which he stood. Presently he found himself at his own door, very tired and a little dazed in mind, thinking of that precipice, of nothing more distinct. The house stood very solid, very tranquil, its red roof all illumined with the last level line of the sun, the garden stretching into shady corners under the trees, the flower-beds blazing in lavish colours, the little lawn all burnt bare by the ardent sun and worn with the feet of the tennis players: all so peaceful, certain, secure—an old-established home with deep foundations dug, and the assured, immovable look of household tranquillity and peace. If the walls had been tottering, the garden relapsing into weeds and wildness, he would not have been surprised—that would have been suitable to his circumstances. The thing unsuitable was to come back to that trim order and well-being, to that modest wealth and comfort and beauty, and to know that all this too, like himself, was on the edge of the precipice. Tired as he was, he went round the garden before he went in, and gazed wistfully at the pleasant dwelling with its open windows, wondering, when the next shock of the earthquake came, whether it would all fall to pieces like a house of cards, and everybody become aware that the earth was rent and a great chasm yawning before the peaceful door.

He never seemed to have realised, before now, how full of modest luxury and exquisite comfort that house was. It was not yet covered up and dismantled, though the fingers of the maid-servants had been itching to get at that delightful task since ever 'the family' left. All was empty and still, but all in good order; no false pretension or show, everything temperate and well chosen; rich, soft carpets in which the foot sank, curtains hanging in graceful folds, the cosiest chairs, Italian cabinets, Venice glass, pictures, not only of his own but of many contemporary artists—a delightful interior, without a bare corner or vacant spot anywhere. He went over it with a sort of despairing pleasure and admiration, his head aching and giddy, with a sense that at any moment the next shock might come, and all collapse like the

shadows of a dream. Presently he was served with his dinner, which he could not eat, in the cool dining-room, with a large window opening to the garden and the sweet air breathing about him as he sat down at the vacant table. What a mockery of all certitude and safety it was!—for nothing could seem more firmly established, more solid and secure. If he had been a prince of the blood he might have had a more splendid dwelling, but no more comfort, more pleasantness. All that a sober mind could desire was there—the utmost refinement of comfort, beautiful things all around, every colour subdued into perfection, no noise or anything to break the spell. He was glad that the others were absent—it was the only alleviation to the dismay within him. There would have been questions as to what was the matter—‘Are you ill, Edward?’ ‘What is wrong with papa?’ and other such questions, which he could not have borne.

Afterwards he went into the studio. The first thing that caught his eye was the glow of that piece of drapery which he had painted under the keen stimulant of the first warning. It had been a stimulant then, and he was startled by the splendour of the colour he had put into that piece of stuff—the roundness of it, the clear transparence of the shadows. It stood out upon the picture like something by another hand, painted in another age. Had he done that only a few hours ago—he with the same brushes which had produced the rest of the picture which looked so pale and insignificant beside it? how had he done it? It made all the rest of the picture fade. He recognised in a moment the jogtrot, the ordinary course of life, and against it the flush of the sudden inspiration, the stronger handling, the glory and glow of the colour. He had never done anything better in his life; he whose pictures were drugs in the market, who had not a commission to look forward to. He stood and looked at it for a long time, growing sadder and sadder. He was not a man who had failed, and who could rail against the world; he was a man who had succeeded; not a painter in England but would laugh out if anyone said that Sandford had been a failure. Why, who had been successful if he had not? they would have said. He had not a word to say against fate. Nobody was to blame, not even himself, seeing that now, in the midst of all, he could still paint like that. He knew the value of that as well as any man could know it. He could not shut his eyes to it because he himself had done it. If he saw such a bit of painting in a young fellow’s picture

he would say, 'Well done;' he would say, 'Paint like that, and you have your fortune in your own hand.' Ah, but he was himself no longer a young fellow. Success was not before him; he had grasped her, held her, and now it seemed his day was past.

It is never cheerful to have to allow that your day is past. But there are circumstances which make it less difficult. Sometimes a man accepts gracefully enough that message of dismissal. Then he will retire with a certain dignity, enjoying the ease which he has purchased with his hard work, and looking on henceforward at the struggle of the others, not sorry, perhaps, or at least saying to the world that he is not sorry, to be out of that conflict. Mr. Sandford said to himself that in other circumstances he might have been capable of that; might have laid aside his pencil, occupied himself with guiding the younger, helping the less strong, standing umpire, perhaps, in the strife, giving place to those who represented the future, and whose day was but beginning. Such a retirement must always seem a fit and seemly thing: but not now: not in what he felt was but the fullness of his career: not, above all—and this gave the sting to all—not while he was still depending upon his profession for his daily bread. His daily bread, and what was worse than that, the daily bread of those he loved. How many things that simple phrase involved! Oh for the simplicity of those days when it meant but what it said! He asked himself with a curious, fantastic, half-amused, half-despairing curiosity whether it had ever meant mere bread? Bread and a little fruit, perhaps; a cake, and a draught from a spring in the primitive Eastern days when the phrase was invented. 'Day by day our daily bread:' a loaf like that of Elijah which the angel brought him: the cakes of manna in the wilderness of which only enough was gathered to suffice for one day: and the tent at night to retire to, or a cave, perhaps,—a shelter which cost nothing. How different now was daily bread; so many things involved in it, that careful product of many men's work, the house which was his home: and all the costly nameless necessities, so much more than food and clothing, the dainty and pleasant things, the flowers and gardens, the amusements, the trifles that make life delightful and sweet. Give us our daily bread: had it ever been supposed to mean all that? All these many years, these necessities had been supplied, and all had gone on as if it were part of the constitution of the world.

But now the time had come when the machinery was stopped, when everything was brought to a conclusion. Mr. Sandford turned his eye from that bit of painting which stood out upon his picture as if the sun had touched it, to the sheaves of old studies and sketches in the portfolios, the half-finished bits about the walls, all those scraps and fragments, full of suggestion, full of beautiful thoughts, which make the studio of a great painter rich. He had thought a few days ago that all this meant wealth. Now his eyes were opened, and he saw that it meant nothing, that all about him was rubbish not worth the collection, and himself, who could work no longer, who was no more good for anything, only one piece of lumber the more, the most valueless of all.

He paused and tried to say to himself that this was morbid. But it was not morbid, it was true. With that curious hurrying of the thoughts which a great calamity brings about, he had already glimpsed everything, seeing the whole situation and all that was involved. There was a certain sum of money in the bank, no more anywhere, except on his own death. There was his insurance, a little for everyone, enough he had hoped, though in a much changed and subdued manner, to support his wife and the girls, enough for that daily bread of which he had been thinking; but it could not be had till he died; and that was all. There was nothing, nothing more; nothing to live upon, nothing to turn to. If you have losses, if your income is reduced, you can retrench and diminish your expenses. But when everything is cut off in a moment, when you have no income at all? such utter loss paralyses the unfortunate. He stood in his studio with a sort of vague smile upon his face, and something of the imbecility of utter helplessness taking possession of him. Everything cut off. Nothing to turn to. Vague visions passed through his mind of the expenses of that seaside house, for instance, which could not be got rid of now; of Lizzie's fifty pounds a year which he had promised not without forebodings; of Jack's fee of two guineas which the children had all made so merry about; of the easy course of their existence, their life, which was so blameless, so innocent, so kind: they were all ready to give, ready to be hospitable; none of the family could see another in want and not eagerly offer what they had. Good God! and to think they had nothing, nothing! It was not a question of enough, it was that there was nothing; that all the streams were closed, and all the doors shut, and the successful man, with his large income, had

suddenly become like a navvy out of work, like a dock labourer, or whatever was most pitifully unprovided for in the world.

It made Mr. Sandford's brain whirl. So much in the bank, and after that nothing; and all the liberal life going on; the servants who could not be sent off at a moment's notice; the house, which could not be abandoned; the family all so cheerful in their false security, who had no presentiment of evil. He asked himself what people did who were ruined? He had no great acquaintance with such things. What did they do? He was very helpless. He could not realise the possibility of breaking up the house, having no home; of dispersing all the pleasant things which had been part of his being so long; of stopping short—— He could not understand how such things were done. And those people who were ruined generally had something upon which they could fall back. A merchant could begin again. He might have friends who would help him to a new start, and there was always hope that he might do as well at last as at first. But an artist (at sixty) could have no new start. The public would have none of him. He had done his best; he could not begin anew. His career when once closed was over, and nothing more could be made of it. He remembered with a forlorn self-reproach of having himself said that So-and-so should retire; that it would be more dignified to give up work before work gave him up. Ah! so easy a thing to say, so cruel a thing to say; but he had not realised that it was cruel, or that such an end was cruel. He had never supposed it possible that such a thing could happen to himself.

The insurances: yes, there were always the insurances: a thousand pounds for each child, that was the calculation they had made. They had said to each other in the old times, Mary and he, that they never could save money enough to make any appreciable provision for so many children, but that if they could but secure for each a thousand pounds, that would always be something. It would help to give the boys a start; it would be something for the girls. That the boys should all have professions in which they would be doing well, and the girls husbands to provide for them, had seemed too commonplace a certainty even to be dwelt upon: and a thousand pounds is never to be despised; it would help the young ones over any early struggle, it would make all the difference. 'So long as we live,' Mrs. Sandford had said, 'they will always have us to fall back upon:

and afterwards—what a thing it would have been for us, Edward, to have a thousand pounds to the good to begin upon!’ They had thought they made everything safe so, for the young ones. Mr. Sandford, indeed, still felt a faint lightening of his heart as he thought of the insurances. It had always done him good to think of them; that would be something at least to leave behind. But then it was necessary first that he should die.

He had never thought urgently of that necessity. So long as there is nothing pressing about it, no appearance of its approach, it is easy enough to speak of that conclusion. Sometimes there is even a pensive pleasure in it. ‘When I am out of the way;’ ‘When our day is over,’ are things quite simple to say. For of course that must come one time or another, as everybody knows. It is more serious, but still not anything very bad, to speak now and then of what is to be done if anything happens to one. These things make but little impression upon the mind, even when old age is on its way. And Mr. Sandford at sixty had as yet felt very few premonitions of old age. He had called himself an old man with a laugh, for his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated; and it was still pleasantly absurd to think that he could be supposed an old man. But now all this took a different aspect. He felt no older, indeed, but his position was altogether changed. In the shock of his new circumstances he stood helpless, not knowing how to meet this unfeared, unthought-of contingency. But his mind went off with a spring to further eventualities. The only comfort was this, they had a thousand pounds apiece laid up for them. But it would be necessary first that he should die.

Thinking it all over, he thought, on the whole, that this was the best thing that could happen. The changes which he surveyed with such a sense of impossibility, not knowing how they could be brought about, would become quite natural if he died. There was always a change on the death of the father. It was the natural time for remodelling life, for altering everything. The family would not be able, of course, to remain in this house, to keep up their present superstructure of existence: but then in the change of circumstances that would seem quite natural, and they would not feel it. They could put everything, then, upon a simple footing. And they would have an income, not much of an income, perhaps, but yet something that would come in punctually to the day, and which would be independent of anything they did,

which would have nothing to do with picture dealers or patrons of art, or the changes of taste that affected them. What a thing that was, when one came to think of it, to have an income—something which came in all the same whether you worked or not, whether you were ill or well, whether you were in a good vein and could get on with your picture, or whether it dragged and did not satisfy you! It gave him a sensation of pleasure to think of it: but then he reflected on the one preliminary which was not so easy to bring about, which no planning of his could accomplish just when it was wanted, just when it would be of most use.

For before this state of things could ensue, it would be necessary that Mr. Sandford should be dead; and so far as he was aware there was no immediate prospect of anything of the kind. People do not die when it is most necessary, when it would be most expedient. It is a thing independent of your own will, horribly uncertain, happening just when it is not wanted. This difficulty, when he had begun to take a little comfort in the possible arrangement of everything, sent the painter back into all the confusion of miserable thoughts. Was it possible that he was in circumstances which made it impossible for him to do anything, even to die?

V.

Mr. Sandford went down next day to the seaside to join his family. They had got the best rooms of a very pleasant house, in full sight of the sea. 'What was the use of going to the sea at all,' Mrs. Sandford said, 'unless you got the full good of it? All the sunsets and effects, and its aspect at every hour of the day, which was so very different from having merely glimpses of it—that is what my husband likes,' she said. And of course this meant the most expensive place. He was met at the station by his wife and little Mary, the youngest, who was always considered papa's favourite. The others had all gone along the coast with a large pic-nic party, some of them in a boat, some riding—for there were fine sands—and a delightful gallop along that crisp firm road, almost within the flash of the waves, was most invigorating. 'They all look ever so much the better for it already,' said the fond mother.

'There was not much the matter with them before that I could see.'

'Oh, nothing the matter! But they do so enjoy the sea. And I find there are a great many people here whom we know—more than usual; and a great deal going on.'

'There is generally a good deal going on.'

'My dear Edward, staying behind has not been good for you; you are looking pale: and I never heard you grudge the children their little pleasures before.'

'I stayed at home, papa,' said little Mary, not willing to be unappreciated, 'to be the first to see you.'

'You are always a good little girl,' said the father gratefully.

'I assure you they were all anxious to stay: but I did not think you would like them to give up a pleasure,' said Mrs. Sandford, never willing to have any of her children subjected to an unfavourable comparison.

'No; oh no,' he said, with a sigh. It was almost impossible not to feel a grudge at the thought of that careless enjoyment, no one taking any thought; but he could not burst out with any disclosures of his trouble before little Mary, looking up wistfully in his face with a child's sensitiveness to the perception of something wrong. Mary was more ready to perceive this than Mrs. Sandford, who only thought that her husband was perhaps a little out of temper, or annoyed by some trifling matter, or merely affected by the natural misanthropy of three days' solitude. She clasped his arm caressingly with her hand as she led him away.

'You have got some cobwebs into your mind,' she said, 'but the sea breezes will soon blow them away.'

The sea breezes were very fresh; the sea itself spread out under the sunshine a dazzling stretch of blue; the wide vault of heaven all belted with lines of summer cloud, 'which landward stretched along the deep' like celestial countries far away. The air was filled with the soft splash of the water, the softened sound of voices. The whole population seemed out of doors, and all in full enjoyment of the heavenly afternoon and the sights and sounds of the sea. Walking along through these holiday groups, with his wife by his side and his little girl holding his hand, Mr. Sandford felt an unreasonable calm—a sense of soothing quiet come over him. He could not dismiss the phantom which overshadowed him, but he felt for the moment that he could ignore it. It was necessary that he should ignore it. He could not communicate to his wife so tragical a discovery there and then, in her ease and cheerful holiday mood. He must prepare her for

it. Not all in a moment could that revelation burst upon her. Poor Mary! so happy in her children, so full of their plans and pleasures, so secure in the certainty of prosperous life: and the child who, strange to think it, understood him better, being nearer, he supposed, to those springs of life where there are no shades of intervening feeling, but all is either happiness or despair. A profound sorrow for these innocent creatures came into his mind; he could not overcloud them, either the mother or the child. They were so glad to have him again; so proud to walk on either side of him, pointing out everything: and all was so happy, were it not for one thing; nothing to trouble them, all well, all full of pleasure, confidence, health, lightheartedness; not a cloud—except that one.

‘You have been tiring yourself—doing too much while you have been alone; the servants have made you uncomfortable; they have been pulling everything to pieces, though I left the most stringent orders——’

‘No, the servants were very good; they disturbed nothing, though they were longing to get at it.’

‘They always are; they take a positive pleasure in making the house look as desolate as possible—as if nobody was ever going to live in it any more.’

‘Nobody going to live in it more!’ he repeated the words with a faint smile. ‘No—on the contrary, it looked the most liveable place I ever saw. I never felt its home-look so much.’

‘It is a nice little place,’ she said, with a little pressure of his arm. ‘Whatever may happen to the children in after life, we can always feel that they have had a happy youth and a bright home.’

‘What should happen to them?’ he said, alarmed with a sudden fear that she must know.

‘Oh, nothing, I hope, but what is good; but the first change in the family always makes one think. I hope you won’t mind, Edward: Lance Moulton is here.’

‘Oh, he is here!’

‘If it is really to be so, Edward, don’t you think it is better they should see as much of each other as possible?’ his wife said, with another tender pressure of his arm. ‘And somehow, when there is a thing of that kind in the air, everything seems quickened; I am sure I can’t tell how it is. It gives a “go” to all they are doing. There are no end of plans and schemes among

them. Of course, Lance has a friend or two about, and the Dropmores are here, who are such friends of our girls.'

'And all is fun and nonsense, I suppose?'

'Well, if you call it so—all pleasure, and kindness, and real delightful holiday. Oh, Edward,' said Mrs. Sandford, with the ghost of a tear in her eye, 'don't let us check this! It is the brightest time of their lives.'

The sunset was blazing in glory upon the sea, the belts of cloud all reddening and glowing, soft puffs of vapour like roses floating across the blue of the sky. And the air full of young voices softened and musical, children playing, lovers wandering about, happy mothers watching the sport, all tender gaiety, and security, and peace. Everything joyful—save one thing. 'No; God forbid that I should check it,' he said hastily, with a sigh that might have been a groan.

They all came back not long after, full of high spirits and endless talk; they were all glad to see father, who had never been any restraint upon their pleasure, whose grave gentle presence had never checked or stilled them. They were sure of his sympathy more or less. If he did not share their fun, he had at least never discouraged it. And soon in the plenitude of their own affairs they forgot him, as was so natural, and filled the room with laughing consultations over to-morrow's pleasure, and plans for it. 'What are we going to do?' they all cried, one after another, even Lizzie and Lance, coming in a little dazzled from the balcony, where they had been enjoying the last fading lights of the ending day, while the others had clamoured for lamps and candles inside; 'what are we going to do?' Mrs. Sandford sat beaming upon them, hearing all the suggestions, offering a new idea now and then. 'I must know to-night, that the hampers may be got ready,' she said; and then there was an echoing laugh all round. 'Mother's always so practical.' Mr. Sandford sat a little outside of that lively circle with a book in his hand. But he was not reading; he was watching them with a strange fascination; not willing to check them; oh, no! feeling a helpless sort of wonder that they should play such pranks on the edge of the precipice, and that none of them should divine—that even his wife should not divine! The animated group, full in the light of the lamps—girls and young men in the frank familiarity of the family, interrupting each other, contradicting each other, discussing and arguing—was as charming a study as a

painter could have ; the mother in the midst with her pencil in her hand and a sheet of white paper on the table before her, which threw back the light ; and behind, the lovers stealing in out of the soft twilight shadows, the faint glimmer of distant sea and sky. He watched it with a strange dull ache under the pleasure of the father and the painter : the light touching those graceful outlines, shining in those young eyes, the glimmer of shining hair, the play of animated features, the soft dreamlike suggestive shadows of the two behind. And yet the precipice yawning gaping at their feet, though nobody knew.

‘Papa,’ said suddenly a small voice in his ear, ‘I am not going to-morrow. I want to stay with you.’

‘My little Mary ! But I am a dull old fellow, not worth staying with.’

‘You are sorry about something, papa !’

‘Sorry ? There are a great many things in the world to be sorry about,’ he said, stroking her brown head. The child had clasped her hands about his arm, and was nestling close up to him whispering. They were altogether outside of the lively group at the table. This little consoler comforted Mr. Sandford more than words could say.

It was thus that the holiday life went on. The young people were always consulting what to do, making up endless excursions and expeditions, Mrs. Sandford always explaining for them. What was the use of being at the seaside if they did not take full advantage of it ? What was the use of being in a new part of the country if they did not see everything ? Sometimes she went with them, compelled by the addition of various strangers with whom the girls could not go without a chaperon ; sometimes stayed at home with her husband, calculating where they would be by this time ; whether they had found a pleasant spot for their luncheon ; when they might be expected back. Meanwhile, Mr. Sandford took long solitary walks—very long, very solitary—along the endless line of the sands, within sight and sound of the sea. Little Mary and her next brother, the schoolboy, always started with him : but the fascination of the rocks and pools was too much for these little people, and the father, not ill-pleased, went on with a promise of picking them up again on his way back. He would walk on and on for the whole of the fresh shining morning, with the sea on one side and the green country on the other, and all the wonderful magical lights of the sky and water shining as

if for him alone. They beguiled him out of himself with their miraculous play and shimmer and wealth of heavenly reflection: and sometimes he seemed to feel a higher sensation still—the feeling as of a silent great Companion who filled the heavenly space, yet moved with him, an all-embracing, all-responsive sympathy, till he thought of God coming down to the cool of the garden and walking with his creatures, and all his trouble seemed to breathe away in a heavenly hush, which every little wave repeated, softly lapping at his feet.

But when he came back into the midst of his cheerful family other subjects got the upper hand. There was not the least harm in the gaiety that was about him—not the least harm; it was mere exuberance of youthful life and pleasure. If things had been running their usual course, and his usual year's work had been in front of him, Mr. Sandford said to himself that he too would have come out to the door to see the children start on their expeditions, as his wife did, with pleasure in their good looks, and in the family union and happiness. He might have grumbled a little over Harry's idleness, or even shaken his head over the expense; but he too would have liked it—he would have admired his young ones, and taken pleasure in seeing them happy. But to stand by and watch all that, and know that presently the revenue which kept it all up would stop, and the ground be cut from under their feet, sheer down, like a precipice! Already he had begun to familiarise himself with this idea. It had a sort of paralysing effect, as well as one of panic and horror. It is not a thing that happens often. People grow poorer, or even they get ruined at a blow, but there is generally something remaining upon which economy will tell; he went over these differences in his lonely hours, imagining a hundred cases. A merchant, for instance, who ruins himself by speculation, if he is an honourable man, has means at his disposal of trying again, or at least can get a situation in an office (at the worst), where he will still have an income—a steady income, though it may be small; his friends, and the people who had business relations with him, would be sure to exert themselves to secure him that; or if his losses were but partial, of course nothing could be easier than to retrench and live at a lower rate. So Mr. Sandford said to himself. But what can a few economies do when at a critical moment, at a period close at hand, all incoming must cease, and nothing remain? It did not now give him the violent shock of sensation

which he had felt at first when this fact came uppermost. He had become accustomed to it. It was not *après moi*, but in three months or so, the deluge: an end to everything, no half measures, no retrenchment, but the end. He began to wonder when that time came what would be done. The house could be sold, and all that was in it, but where then would they go for shelter? They would have to pay for the poorest lodgings, and at least there was nothing to pay for the house. Mr. Sandford was not a man of business, he was a man of few resources; he did not know what to do, or where to turn when his natural occupation failed him.

These thoughts went through his mind in a painful round. Three months or so, and then an end of everything. Three months, and then the precipice so near that the next step must be over it. Perhaps in other circumstances, or if he had not been known to be so near the head of his profession, he might have thought of artists' work of some other kind which he could do. He might have tried to illustrate books, to take up one of the art manufactures: might have become a designer, a decorator, something that would bring in money. But in this respect he was so helpless, he knew no more what to do than the most ignorant, his heart failed him when he tried to penetrate into the darkness of that future. The only thing that came uppermost was the thought of the insurances, and of the thousand pounds for each which the children would have. It was not very much, but still it was something, a something real and tangible, not like a workman's wages for work, which may fail in a moment as soon as he fails to please his employer, or loses his skill, or grows too old for it. It had never occurred to Mr. Sandford before how precarious these wages are, how little to be relied on. To think of a number of people depending for their whole living upon the skill of one man's hand, upon the clearness of his sight, the truth of his instincts, even the fashion of the moment! It seems, when you look at it in the light of a discovery such as that which he had made, so mad, so fatal! A thing that may cease in a moment as if it had never been, yet with all the complicated machinery of life built upon it, based on the strange theory that it would go on for ever! On the other hand a thousand pounds is a solid thing, it would be a certainty for each of them. Harry might go to one of the colonies and get an excellent start with a thousand pounds in his

pocket. Jack would no doubt be startled into energy by the sense of having something which it would be fatal to lose, yet could not be lived upon. A thousand pounds would make all the difference to Lizzie on her marriage. When he thought of his wife a quiver of pain went over him, and yet he tried to calculate all the chances there would be for her. All friends would be stirred in sympathy for her; they would get her a pension, they would gather round her: it would be made easy for her to break up this expensive way of living, and begin on a smaller footing. There would be the house, which would bring her in a little secure income if it was let. Whatever she had would be secure—it would be based on something solid, certain—not on a man's work, which might lose its excellence or go out of fashion. He felt himself smile with a kind of pleasure at the contemplation of this steady certainty—which he never had possessed, which he never could possess, but which poor Mary, with a pension and the rent of the house, would at last obtain. Poor Mary! his lip quivered when he thought of her. He wondered if the children would absorb her interest as much when he was no longer in the background, whether she would be able to find in them all that she wanted, and consolation for his absence. It was not with any sense of blame that this thought went through his mind. Blame her! oh no. To think of her children was surely a mother's first duty. She was not aware that her husband wanted consolation and help more than they did. How could she know when he did not tell her? And he felt incapable of telling her. He had meant to do it. When he came he had intended as soon as possible to prepare her for it, to lead by degrees to that revelation which could not but be given. But to break in upon all their innocent gaieties, to stop her as she stood kissing her hand to the merry cavalcade as they set out, her eyes shining with a mother's delight and pride; to call her away from among her pretty daughters (she, her husband thought the fairest of them all), and their pleasant babble about pleasures past and to come, and pour black despair into the cheerful heart, how could he do it, how could anyone do it? Such happiness was sacred. He could not interrupt it, he could not destroy it; it was pathetic, tragic, beyond words—on the edge of the precipice! Oh no, no! not now, he could not tell her. Let the holidays be over, let common life resume again, and then—unless by the grace of God something else might happen before.

They all noticed, however, that papa was dull—which was the way in which it struck the young people—that he had no sympathy with their gaiety, that he was ‘grumpy,’ which was what it came to. Lizzie thought that this probably arose from dissatisfaction with her marriage, and was indignant. ‘If he doesn’t think Lance good enough, I wonder what would please him. Did he expect one of the princes to propose to me?’ she cried.

‘Oh, Lizzie, my love, don’t speak so of your father!’

‘Well, mamma, he should not look at us so,’ cried the girl.

Mrs. Sandford herself was a little indignant too. Her sympathies were all with the children. She saw disapproval in his subdued looks, and was ready at any moment to spring to arms in defence of her children. And indeed sometimes, in his great trouble, which no one divined, Mr. Sandford would sometimes become impatient.

‘I wish,’ he would say, ‘that Jack would do something—does he never do anything at all? It frets me to see a young man so idle.’

‘My dear Edward!’ cried his wife, ‘it is the Long Vacation. What should he have to do?’

‘And Harry?’ Mr. Sandford said.

‘Poor boy! You know he would give his little finger to have anything to do. He has nothing to do. How can he help that? When we go back to town you must really put your shoulder to the wheel. Among all your friends surely, surely, something could be got for Harry,’ said his mother, thus turning the tables. ‘And in the meantime,’ she added, ‘to get all the health he can, and the full good of the sea, is certainly the best thing the poor fellow could do.’

What answer could be made to this? Mr. Sandford went out for his walk—that long silent walk, in which the great Consoler came down from all the silvery lights and shining skies, and walked with him in the freshness of the morning, all silent in tenderness and great solemnity and awe.

VI.

‘Unless, by the grace of God, something should happen’—that was what he kept saying to himself when he reflected on the disclosure which must be made when the seaside season was over. The great events of life rarely happen according to our will. A man cannot die when he wishes it, though there should be every

argument in favour of such an event, and its advantages most palpable. The moment passes in which that conclusion would have all the force and satisfactory character of a great tragedy, and a dreary postscript of existence drivels on, destructive of all dignity and appropriateness. We live when we should do much better to die, and we die sometimes when every circumstance calls upon us to live.

Most people will think that it was a very dreary hope that moved Mr. Sandford's mind—perhaps even that it was not the expedient of a brave man to desire to leave his wife and children to endure the change and the struggle from which he shrank in his own person. But this was not how it appeared to him. He thought, and with some reason, that the change which becomes inevitable on the death of the head of a house is without humiliation, without the pang of downfall which would be involved in an entire reversal of life which had not that excuse; he thought that everybody who knew him would regret the change, and that every effort would be made to help those who were left behind. It would be no shame to them to accept that help; it would seem to them a tribute to his position rather than pity for them. His wife would believe that her husband, a great painter, one of the first of the day, had fully earned that recognition, and would be proud of the pension or the money raised for her as of a monument in his honour. And then the insurances. There could be no doubt, he said to himself with a rueful smile, that so much substantial money would be much better to have than a man who could earn nothing, who had become incapable, whose work nobody wanted. He had no doubt whatever that it would be by far the best solution. It would rouse the boys by a sharp and unmistakable necessity; it might, he thought, be the making of the boys, who had no fault in particular except the disposition to take things easily which was the weakness of this generation. And as for the others they would be taken care of—no doubt they would be taken care of. Their condition would appeal to the kindness of every friend who had ever bought a 'Sandford' or thought it an honour to know the painter. He would even himself be restored to honour and estimation by the act of dying, which often is a very ingratiating thing, and makes the public change its opinion. All these arguments were so strongly in favour of it that to think there was no means of securing it depressed Mr. Sandford's mind more than all. By the grace of God. But it is certain that the

Disposer of events does not always see matters as His creatures see them. No one can make sure, however warmly such a decree might be wished for, or even prayed for, that it will be given. If only that would happen! But it was still more impossible to secure its happening than to open a new market for the pictures, or cause commissions to pour in again.

It may be asked whether Mr. Sandford's conviction, which was so strong on this subject, ever moved him to do anything to bring about his desire. It was impossible, perhaps, that the idea should not have crossed his mind—

When we ourselves can our demission make
With a bare bodkin.

And we can scarcely say that it was, like Hamlet, the fear of something after death that restrained him. It was a stronger sentiment still. It was the feeling that to give oneself one's dismissal is quite a different thing. It is a flight—it is a running away; all the arguments against the selfishness of desiring to leave his wife and children to a struggle from which he had escaped came into action against that. What would be well if accomplished by the grace of God would be miserable if done by the will of the man who might be mistaken in his estimate of the good it would do. And then another practical thought, more tragical than any in its extreme materialism and matter-of-fact character, it would vitiate the insurances! If the children were to gain nothing by his death, then it would certainly be better for them that he should live. On that score there could be no doubt. This made suicide as completely out of the question from a physical point of view as it was already from a spiritual. He could not discharge himself from God's service on earth, though he should be very thankful if God would discharge him; and he could not do anything to endanger the precious provision he had made for his family. It can scarcely be said that Mr. Sandford considered this case at leisure or with comparison of the arguments for and against, for his decision was instinctive and immediate; nevertheless the idea floated uppermost sometimes in the surging and whirl up and down of many thoughts, but always to be dismissed in the same way.

Two or three weeks had passed in this way when one evening Mr. Sandford received a letter from Daniells, the dealer, inviting him to join a party on the Yorkshire moors. Daniells was well enough off to be able to deny himself nothing. He was not a

gentleman, yet the sports that gentlemen love were within reach of his wealth, and gentlemen not so well off as he showed much willingness to share in his good things. Some fine people whose names it was a pleasure to read were on his list, and some painters who were celebrated enough to eclipse the fine people. That all these should be gathered together by a man who was as ignorant as a pig, and not much better bred, was wonderful; but so it was. Perhaps the fact that Daniells was really at heart a good fellow had something to do with it: but even had this not been the case, it is probable that he could still have found guests to shoot on his moor, and eat the birds they had shot. Mr. Sandford was no sportsman, and at first he had little inclination to accept. It was his wife who urged him to do so.

'You are not enjoying Broadbeach as you usually do,' she said; 'you are bored by it. Oh, don't tell me, Edward, I can see it in your eyes.'

'If you think so, my dear, no denial of mine——'

'No,' she said, shaking her head; 'nothing you say will change my opinion. I am dreadfully sorry, for I am fond of the place; but I have made up my mind already never to come here again, for you are bored—it is as plain as possible: you want a change: you must go.'

'It is not much of a change to visit Daniells,' said Mr. Sandford.

'Oh, it isn't Daniells; it's the company, and the distance, and all you will find there. I have no objection to Mr. Daniells, Edward.'

'Nor I; he is a good fellow in spite of his "h's."'

'I don't care about his "h's." He's very hospitable and very friendly, and all the nice people go to him. I saw in the papers that Lord Okeham was there. You might be able to speak a word for Harry.'

Mr. Sandford smiled. 'I am to go, then, as a business speculation,' he said; but his smile faded away very soon, for he reflected that Lord Okeham was the first to give him that sensation of being wanted no longer, of having nobody to employ him, which had risen to such a tragic height since then.

'Don't laugh,' said his wife. 'I do think indeed it is your duty—anything that may help on the children; and you do like Mr. Daniells, Edward.'

'Yes, I do like Daniells; he is a very good fellow.'

‘And the change will do you good. You must go.’

It was arranged so almost without any voluntary action on his part. His wife’s anxiety that he should ‘speak a word for Harry’ seemed to him half-pathetic, half-ridiculous in what he knew to be the position of affairs; but then she did not know. It can scarcely be said that it was other than a relief to him to leave his family to their own lighthearted devices, or that the young ones were not at least half-pleased when he went away. ‘Papa was not a bit like himself,’ they said; probably it was because the heat was too much for him (he preferred cooler weather), and the freshness of the moors would put him all right. Mrs. Sandford was by no means willing to confess to herself that she, too, was relieved by her husband’s departure. It was the first time she had ever been conscious of that feeling in thirty years of married life; but she, too, said that he would be the better of the freshness of the moors, and they all gave themselves up to ‘fun’ with a new rush of pleasure when his grave countenance was away.

‘I am sure he did not mean it,’ said Lizzie, ‘but I could not help feeling that it was poor Lance that was the cause.’

‘Nothing of the sort, my dear,’ said Mrs. Sandford. ‘Your father would have told you if he had any objections. No; I know what it is; he is very anxious about the boys—and so am I.’

No one, however, who had seen her among them could have believed that Mrs. Sandford was very anxious. She was so glad that they should enjoy themselves. Afterwards, when the holidays were over, when they were all back in town again, then something, no doubt, must be done about Harry. He was very thoughtless, to be sure; he took no trouble about what was going to happen to him. Mrs. Sandford threw off any shade of distress, however, by saying to herself that now his father was fully roused to the necessity of doing something, now that he was about to meet Lord Okeham and other influential people, something *must* be found for Harry, and then all would go well. But the look in her husband’s eyes haunted her, nevertheless, for the rest of the day. She had gone to the railway with him to see him off, as she always did, and when the train was just moving, he looked at her, waving his hand to her. The look in his eyes was so strange and so sad, that Mrs. Sandford felt disposed to rush after her husband by the next train. Failing that, she drew her veil over her face as she turned away and shed tears, she could not tell why, as if he had

been going away never to return. How ridiculous! how absurd! when he was only a little out of sorts and sure to be set right by the freshness of the moors. The impression very soon wore out, and the young people had already organised a little impromptu dance for the evening, which gave Mrs. Sandford plenty to do.

‘It looks a little like taking advantage of your father’s absence—as if you were glad he was gone.’

‘Not at all,’ they all cried. ‘What a dreadful idea! The only thing is that it would have bored him horribly; otherwise,’ added Harry, ‘we are always glad of my father’s company,’ with an air of protection and patronage which made the others laugh. And Mrs. Sandford keenly enjoyed the dance, and felt it better that her husband’s face, never so grave before, should not be there to overshadow the evening’s entertainment. He would be so much more in his element discussing light and shade with the other R.A.s, or talking a little moderate politics with Lord Okeham, or breathing in the freshness of the moors.

And he did like the freshness of the moors, and the talk of his brother artists, and the discussions among the men. It was entirely a man’s party, and perhaps a very domestic man like Mr. Sandford, a little neglected amid the exuberances of a young family, his very wife drawn away from him by the exigencies of their amusements, is specially open to the occasional refreshment of a party of his fellows, when congenial pursuits and matured views, and something of a like experience—at all events something which is a real experience of life—draw individuals together. The ‘sport’ of the painters was apt to be interrupted by realisations of the ‘effects’ about them, and by discussions on various artistic-scientific points which only masters in the art could settle; and that semi-professional flavour of the party was extremely interesting to the other men, the public personages and society magnates, who found it very piquant to be thrown amid the painters, and who were inspired thereby to talk their best, and tell their most entertaining stories. No atmosphere of failure accompanied Mr. Sandford into this circle, which was kept hilarious by the host’s jovialities and social mistakes. If anybody knew that Daniells kept in his inner room three ‘Sandfords’ which he could not sell, there was no hint of that knowledge in anything that was said, or in the manner of the other painters towards their fellow, to whom all appealed as to as great an authority as could be found on all questions of art. He was restored,

thus, to the position which, indeed, nobody could take from him, though he should never sell a picture again. It soothed him to feel and see that, to all his brethren, he was as much as ever one of the first painters of his time, and to give his opinion and sustain it with the experience of his long professional life, and much experiment in art. A forlorn hope had been in his mind that Daniells might have some good news for him; that he might say some day, 'That was all a false alarm, old man—I've sold the pictures;' but this unfortunately did not come to pass. Daniells never said it was a false alarm; he even said some things in his rough but not unkindly way which to Mr. Sandford's ear, quickened by trouble, confirmed the disaster; but perhaps Daniells, who had no particular delicacy of perception, did not intend this.

The change, however, did Mr. Sandford a great deal of good: though sometimes, when he found himself alone, the settled shadow of calamity which had closed upon his life, and which must soon be known to all, came over him with almost greater force than at first. It was but seldom that he was alone, even in his own room: yet now and then he would find himself on the moors in the sun-setting, when the western sky was still one blaze of yellow or orange light, varied by bands of cloudy red, with the low hills and sweeps of moor standing black against that waning brightness which, magnificent as it was, sent out little light. Mr. Sandford did not compare his own going out of practical life and possibility, yet preservation of a glow of fame which neither warmed nor enlightened, with that show in the west. People seldom see allegories of their own disaster. But as he strayed along with the sense of dreariness in his heart which the dead and spectral aspect of hill and tree was so well calculated to give, his own circumstances came back to him in tragic glimpses. He thought of the gay group he had left behind, the heedless young creatures singing and dancing on the edge of the precipice, and of the peaceful home lying silent awaiting them, to which they had no doubt of returning, with all its security of comfort and peace, but on the edge of the precipice too. And he thought of Jack's fee, his two guineas, which they had all taken as the best joke in the world, and of Lizzie, who was to have fifty pounds a year from her father, and of Harry, quite happy and content on his schoolboy allowance; and all this going on as if it were the course of nature, unchangeable as the stars or the pillars of the earth. These things glided before him as he looked over all the

inequalities of the moor standing black against the western sky. They were the true facts about him, notwithstanding that in the shelter of this momentary pause he only felt them as at a distance, and less strongly than before realised the ease it would bring if by the grace of God something happened—before—

It was the time of the year when there are various race meetings in the north, and Mr. Daniells had planned to carry his party to the most famous of them. He had his landau and a brake, royally charged with provisions, and filled with his guests. Mr. Sandford had done his best to get off this unnecessary festivity, for which he had little taste. But all his friends, who by this time had begun to perceive that his spirits were not in their usual equable state, resisted and protested. He must come, they said: to leave one behind would spoil the party; he was not to be left alone with all the moorland effects to steal a march upon the other painters. And he had not sufficient energy to stand against their remonstrances. It was easier to yield, and he yielded. The race was not unamusing. Even with all his preoccupation, he took a little pleasure in it, more or less, as most Englishmen do: though it glanced across his mind that somebody might say afterwards, 'Sandford was there, amusing himself on the edge of the precipice.' These vague voices and glimpses of things were not enough to stand against the remonstrances and banter of his friends: and after all, what did it matter? The plunge over the precipice is not less terrible because you may have performed a dance of despair on the edge. It was about sunset on a lovely September evening when the party set out on their return home. They were merry; not that there had been any excess or indulgence unbecoming of English gentlemen. Daniells, it is true, who was not a gentleman, had, perhaps, a little more champagne under his belt than was good for him. But his guests were only merry, talking a little more loudly than usual about the events of the day and the exploits of the favourite, and settling some moderate bets which neither harmed nor elated anyone. Mr. Sandford, who had not betted, was the most silent of the party; the lively talk of the others left him free to retire to his own thoughts. He had got rather into a tangle of dim calculations about his insurances, and how the money would be divided, when somebody suddenly called out 'Hallo! we've got off the road!'

For some time Mr. Sandford was the only one who paid any

attention to this statement. Looking out with a little start, he saw the same scene against which his musings had taken form on previous nights. A sky glowing with a stormy splendour, deep burning orange on the horizon rising through zones of yellow to the daffodil sky above, every object standing out black in the absence of light; not the hedgerows and white line of the road alone, but the blunt inequalities of the moor, here a lump of gorse and gnarled hawthorn bushes, there a treacherous hollow with a gleam of water gathered as in a cup. The coachman and grooms had not been so prudent as their masters, their potations had been heavier than champagne. How they had left the road and got upon the moor could never be discovered. It was partly the perplexing glow above and blackness below, partly the fumes of a long day's successive drinkings in their brains; partly, perhaps, as one of the passengers thought, something else. The horses had taken the unusual obstacles on their path with wonderful steadiness at first, but by the time the attention of the gentlemen was fully attracted to what was happening, the coachman had altogether lost control of the kicking and plunging animals. The man was not too far gone to have driven home by the road, but his brain was incapable of any effort to meet such an emergency. He began to flog the horses wildly, to swear at them, to pull savagely at the reins. The groom jumped down to rush to their heads, and in doing so, as they made a plunge at the moment, fell on the roadside, and in a moment more was left behind as the terrified horses dashed on. By this time everybody was roused, and the danger was evident. Mr. Sandford sat quite still; he was not learned about horses, while many of his companions were. One of them got on to the box beside the terrified coachman to try what could be done, the others gave startled and sometimes contradictory suggestions and directions. He was quite calm in the tumult of alarm and eager preparation for any event. He was sensible, profoundly sensible, of the wonderful effect of the scene; the orange glow which no pigments in the world could reproduce, the blackness of the indistinguishable objects which stood up against it like low dark billows of a motionless sea. The shocks of the jolting carriage affected him little, any more than the shouts of the alarmed and excited men. He did not even remark, then, that some sprang off and that others held themselves ready to follow. His sensations were those of perfect calm. He thought of the precipice no more,

nor even of the insurances. Some one shook him by the shoulder, but it did not disturb him. The effect was wonderful; the orange growing intense, darker, the yellow light pervading the illuminated sky. And then a sudden wild whirl, a shock of sudden sensation, and he saw or felt no more.

VII.

Presently the light came back to Mr. Sandford's eyes. He was lying upon the dry heather on the side of the moor, the brown seed-pods nestling against his cheek, the yellow glow in the west, to which his eyes instinctively turned, having scarcely faded at all since he had looked at it from the carriage. A confused sound of noises, loud speaking, and moans of pain reached him where he lay, but scarcely moved him to curiosity. His first sensation was one of curious ease and security. He did not attempt to budge, but lay quite peacefully smiling at the sunset, like a child. His head was confused, but there was in it a vague sense of danger escaped, and of some kind of puzzled deliverance from he knew not what, which gave the strangest feeling of soothing and rest. He felt no temptation to jump up hastily, to go to the help of the people who were moaning, or to inquire into the accident, as in another case he would have done. He lay still, quite at his ease, hearing these voices as if he heard them not, and smiling with a confused pleasure at the glow of orange light in the sky.

He did not know how long it was till some one knelt down and spoke to him anxiously. 'Sandford, are you badly hurt? Sandford, my dear fellow, do you know me? Can you speak to me?'

He burst into a laugh at this address.

'Speak to you? Know you? What nonsense! I am not hurt at all. I am quite comfortable.'

'Thank God!' said the other. 'Duncan, I fear, has a broken leg, and the coachman is—— It was his fault, the unfortunate wretch. Give me your hand, and I'll help you to get up.'

To get up? That was quite a different matter. He did not feel the least desire to try. He felt, before trying and without any sense of alarm, that he could not get up; then said to himself that this was nonsense too, and that to lie there, however comfortably, when he might be helping the others, was not to be thought of. He gave his hand accordingly to his friend, and made

an effort to rise. But it would have been as easy (he said to himself) for a log of wood to attempt to rise. He felt rather like that, as if his legs had turned to wood—not stone, for that would have been cold and uncomfortable. ‘I don’t know how it is,’ he said, still smiling, ‘but I can’t budge. There’s nothing the matter with me, I’m quite easy and comfortable, but I can’t move a limb. I’ll be all right in a few minutes. Look after the others. Never mind me.’ He thought the face of the man who was bending over him looked strangely scared, but nothing more was said. A rug was put over him and one of the cushions of the carriage under his head, and there he lay, vaguely hearing the groans of the man whose leg was broken as (apparently) they moved him, and all the exclamations and questions and directions given by one and another. What was more wonderful was the dying out of that wild orange light in the sky. It paled gradually, as if it had been glowing metal, and the cold night air breathing on it had paled and dwindled that ineffectual fire. A hundred lessening tints and tones of colour—yellows and faint greens, and shades of purple and creamy whiteness breaking the edges—melted and shimmered in the distance. It was like an exhibition got up for him alone, relieved by that black underground, now traversed by gigantic ebony figures of a horse and a man, moving irregularly across the moor. A star came out with a keen blue sparkle, like some power of heaven triumphant over that illumination of earth. What a spectacle it was! And all for him alone!

The next thing he was conscious of was two or three figures about him—one the doctor, whose professional touch he soon discovered on his pulse and his limbs. ‘We are going to lift you. Don’t take any trouble; it will give you no pain,’ some one said. And before he could protest, which he was about to do good-humouredly, that there was no occasion, he found himself softly raised upon some flat and even surface, more comfortable, after all, than the lumps of the heather. Then there was a curious interval of motion along the road, no doubt, though all he saw was the sky with the stars coming gradually out; neither the road nor his bearers, except now and then a dark outline coming within the line of his vision; but always the deep blue of the mid sky shining above. The world seemed to have concentrated in that, and it was not this world, but another world.

He remembered little more, except by snatches; an unknown

face—probably the doctor's—looking exceedingly grave, bending over him; then Daniells' usually jovial countenance with all the lines drooping and the colour blanched out of it, and a sound of low voices talking something over, of which he could only make out the words 'Telegraph at once;' then, 'Too late! It must not be too late. She must come at once.' He wondered vaguely who this was, and why there should be such a hurry. And then, all at once, it seemed to him that it was daylight and his wife was standing by his bedside. He had just woke up from what seemed a very long, confused, and feverish night—how long he never knew. But when he woke everything was clear to him. Unless, by the grace of God, something were to happen—Something was about to happen, by the grace of God.

'Mary!' he cried, with a flush of joy. 'You here!'

'Of course, my dearest,' she said, with a cheerful look, 'as soon as I heard there had been an accident.'

He took her hand between his and drew her to him. 'This was all I wanted,' he said. 'God is very good; He gives me everything.'

'Oh, Edward!' This pitiful protest, remonstrance, appeal to heaven and earth—for all these were in her cry—came from her unawares.

'Yes,' he said, 'my dear, everything has happened as I desired. I understand it all now. I thought I was not hurt; now I see. I am not hurt, I am killed, like the boy—don't you remember?—in Browning's ballad. Don't be shocked, dear. Why shouldn't I be cheerful? I am not—sorry.'

'Oh, Edward!' she cried again, the passion of her trouble exasperated by his composure; 'not to leave—us all?'

He held her hand between his, smiling at her. 'It was what I wanted,' he said—'not to leave you; but don't you believe, my darling, there must be something about that leaving which is not so dreadful, which is made easy to the man who goes away? Certainly, I don't want to leave you; but it's so much for your good—for the children's good—'

'Oh, never, Edward, never!'

'Yes; it's new to you, but I've been thinking about it a long time—so much that I once thought it would almost have been worth the while, but for the insurances, to have—'

'Edward!' She looked at him with an agonised cry.

'No, dear—nothing of the kind. I never would, I never

could have done it. It would have been contrary to nature. The accident—was without any will or action of mine. By the grace of God——’

‘Edward, Edward! Oh, don’t say that; by His hand heavy, heavy upon us!’

‘It is you that should not say that, Mary. If you only knew, my dear. I want you to understand so long as I am here to tell you——’

‘He must not talk so much,’ said the voice of the doctor behind; ‘his strength must be husbanded. Mrs. Sandford, you must not allow him to exhaust himself.’

‘Doctor,’ said Mr. Sandford, ‘I take it for granted you’re a man of sense. What can you do for me? Spin out my life by a few more feeble hours. Which would you rather have yourself? That, or the power of saying everything to the person you love best in the world?’

‘Let him talk,’ said the doctor, turning away; ‘I have no answer to make. Give him a little of this if he turns faint. And send for me if you want me, Mrs. Sandford.’

‘Thanks, doctor. That is a man of sense, Mary. I feel quite well, quite able to tell you everything.’

‘Oh, Edward, when that is the case, things cannot be so bad! If you will only take care, only try to save your strength, to keep up. Oh, my dear! The will to get well does so much! Try! try! Edward, for the love of God.’

‘My own Mary; always believing that everything’s to be done by an effort, as all women do. I am glad it is out of my power. If I were in any pain there might be some hope for you, but I’m in no pain. There’s nothing the matter with me but dying. And I have long felt that was the only way.’

‘Dying?—not when you were with us at the sea?’

‘Most of all then,’ he said with a smile.

‘Oh, Edward, Edward! and I full of amusements, of pleasure, leaving you alone.’

‘It was better so. I am glad of every hour’s respite you have had. And now you’ll be able easily to break up the house, which would have been a hard thing and a bitter downfall in my lifetime. It will be quite natural now. They will give you a pension, and there will be the insurance money.’

‘I cannot bear it,’ she cried wildly. ‘I cannot have you speak like this.’

‘Not when it is the utmost ease to my mind—the utmost comfort——’

She clasped her hands firmly together. ‘Say anything you wish, Edward.’

‘Yes, my poor dear.’ He was very very sorry for his wife. It burst upon her without preparation, without a word of warning. Oh, he was sorry for her! But for himself it was a supreme consolation to pour it all forth, to tell her everything. ‘If I were going to be left behind,’ he said, soothingly, ‘my heart would be broken: but it is softened somehow to those that are going away. I can’t tell you how. It is, though; it is all so vague and soft. I know I’ll lose you, Mary, as you will lose me, but I don’t feel it. My dearest, I had not a commission, not one. And there are three pictures of mine unsold in Daniells’ inner shop. He’ll tell you if you ask him. The three last. That one of the little Queen and her little Maries, that our little Mary sat for, that you liked so much, you remember? It’s standing in Daniells’ room; three of them. I think I see them against the wall.’

‘Edward!’

‘Oh no, my head is not going. I only *think* I see them. And it was the merest chance that the “Black Prince” sold; and not a commission, not a commission. Think of that, Mary. It is true such a thing has happened before, but I never was sixty before. Do you forget I am an old man, and my day is over?’

‘No, no, no,’ she cried with passion; ‘it is not so.’

‘Oh yes; facts are stubborn things—it is so. And what should we have done if our income had stopped in a moment, as it would have done? A precipice before our feet, and nothing, nothing beyond. Now for you, my darling, it will be far easier. You can sell the house and all that is in it. And they will give you a pension, and the children will have something to begin upon.’

‘Oh, the children!’ she cried, taking his hand into hers, bowing down her face upon it. ‘Oh, Edward, what are the children between you and me?’ She cast them away in that supreme moment; the young creatures all so well, so gay, so hopeful. In her despair and passion she flung their crowding images from her—those images which had forced her husband from her heart.

He laughed a low, quiet laugh. ‘God bless them,’ he said; ‘but I like to have you all to myself, you and me only, for the last moment, Mary. You have been always the best wife that

ever was—nay, I won't say have been—you are, my dear, my wife. We don't understand anything about widows, you and I. Death's nothing, I think. It looks dreadful when you're not going. But God manages all that so well. It is as if it were nothing to me. Mary, where are you?'

'Here, Edward, holding your hand. Oh, my dear, don't you see me?'

'Yes, yes,' he said, with a faint laugh, as if ashamed at some mistake he had made, and put his other hand over hers with a slight groping movement. 'It's getting late,' he said; 'it's getting rather dark. What time is it? Seven o'clock? You'll not go down to dinner, Mary? Stay with me. They can bring you something upstairs.'

'Go down? Oh, no, no. Do you think I would leave you, Edward?' She had made a little pause of terror before she spoke, for, indeed, it was broad day, the full afternoon sunshine still bright outside, and nothing to suggest the twilight. He sighed again—a soft, pleasurable sigh.

'If you don't mind just sitting by me a little. I see your dear face in glimpses, sometimes as if you had wings and were hovering over me. My head's swimming a little. Don't light the candles. I like the half light; you know I always did. So long as I can see you by it, Mary. Is that a comfortable chair? Then sit down, my love, and let me keep your hand, and I think I'll get a little sleep.'

'It will do you good,' said the poor wife.

'Who knows?' he said, with another smile. 'But don't let them light the candles.'

Light the candles! She could see, where she sat there, the red sunshine falling in a blaze upon a ruddy heathery hill, and beating upon the dark firs which stood out like ink against that background. There is perhaps nothing that so wrings the heart of the watcher as this pathetic mistake of day for night which betrays the eyes from which all light is failing. He lay within the shadow of the curtain, always holding her hand fast, and fell asleep—a sleep which, for a time, was soft and quiet enough, but afterwards got a little disturbed. She sat quite still, not moving, scarcely breathing, that she might not disturb him; not a tear in her eye, her whole being wound up into an external calm which was so strangely unlike the tumult within. And she had forsaken him—left him to meet calamity without her support, without

sympathy or aid! She had been immersed in the pleasures of the children, their expeditions, their amusements. She remembered, with a shudder, that it had been a little relief to get him away, to have their dance undisturbed. Their dance! Her heart swelled as if it would burst. She had been his faithful wife since she was little more than a child. All her life was his—she had no thought, no wish, apart from him. And yet she had left him to bear this worst of evils alone!

Mrs. Sandford dared not break the sacred calm by a sob or a sigh. She dared not even let the tears come to her eyes, lest he should wake and be troubled by the sight of them. What thoughts went through her mind as she sat there, not moving! Her past life all over, which, until that telegram came, had seemed the easy tenor of every day; and the future, so dark, so awful, so unknown—a world which she did not understand without him.

After an interval he began to speak again, but so that she saw he was either asleep still or wandering in those vague regions between consciousness and nothingness. 'All against the wall—with the faces turned,' he said. 'Three—all the last ones: the one my wife liked so. In the inner room: Daniells is a good fellow. He spared me the sight of them outside. Three—that's one of the perfect numbers—that's—I could always see them: on the road, and on the moor, and at the races: then—I wonder—all the way up—on the road to heaven? no, no. One of the angels—would come and turn them round—turn them round. Nothing like that in the presence of God. It would be disrespectful—disrespectful. Turn them round—with their faces—' He paused; his eyes were closed, an ineffable smile came over his mouth. 'He—will see what's best in them,' he said.

After this for a time silence reigned, broken only now and then by a word sometimes unintelligible. Once his wife thought she caught something about the 'four square walls in the new Jerusalem,' sometimes tender words about herself, but nothing clear. It was not till night that he woke, surprising them with an outcry as to the light, as he had previously spoken about the darkness.

'You need not,' he said, 'light such an illumination for me—*al giorno* as the Italians say; but I like it—I like it. Daniells—has the soul of a prince.' Then he put out his hands feebly, calling 'Mary! Mary!' and drew her closer to him, and whispered a long earnest communication; but what it was the poor lady

never knew. She listened intently, but she could not make out a word. What was it? What was it? Whatever it was, to have said it was an infinite satisfaction to him. He dropped back upon his pillows with an air of content indescribable, and silent pleasure. He had done everything, he had said everything. And in this mood slept again, and woke no more.

Mr. Sandford's previsions were all justified. The house was sold to advantage, at what the agent called a fancy price, because it had been his house—with its best furniture undisturbed. Everything was miserable enough indeed, but there was no humiliation in the breaking up of the establishment, which was evidently too costly for the widow. She got her pension at once, and a satisfactory one, and retired with her younger children to a small house which was more suited to her circumstances. And Lord Okeham, touched by the fact that Sandford's death had taken place under the same roof, in a room next to his own (though that, to be sure, in an age of competition and personal merit was nothing), found somehow, as a Cabinet Minister no doubt can if he will, a post for Harry, in which he got on just as well as other young men, and settled down into a very good servant of the State. And Jack, being thus suddenly sobered and called back to himself, and eager to get rid of the intolerable thought that he, too, had weighed upon his father's mind, and made his latter days more sad, took to his profession with zeal, and got on, as no doubt any determined man does when he adopts one line and holds by it. The others settled down with their mother in a humbler way of living, yet did not lose their friends, as it is common to say people do. Perhaps they were not asked any longer to the occasional 'smart' parties to which the pretty daughters and well-bred sons of Sandford the famous painter, who could dispense tickets for Academy soirées and private views, were invited, more or less on sufferance. These failed them, their names falling out of the invitation books; but what did that matter, seeing they never had been but outsiders, flattered by the cards of a countess, but never really penetrating beyond the threshold?

Mrs. Sandford believed that she could not live when her husband was thus taken from her. The remembrance of that brief but dreadful time when she had abandoned him, when the children and their amusements had stolen her heart away, was

heavy upon her, and though she steeled herself to carry out all his wishes, and to do everything for them that could be done, yet she did it all with a sense that the time was short, and that when her duty was thus accomplished she would follow him. This softened everything to her in the most wonderful way. She felt herself to be acting as his deputy through all these changes, glad that he should be saved the trouble, and that humiliation and confession of downfall which was not now involved in any alteration of life she could make, and fully confident that when all was completed she would receive her dismissal and join him where he was. But she was a very natural woman, with all the springs of life in her unimpaired. And by-and-by, with much surprise, with a pang of disappointment, and yet a rising of her heart to the new inevitable solitary life which was so different, which was not solitary at all, but full of the stir and hum of living, yet all silent in the most intimate and closest circle, Mrs. Sandford recognised that she was not to die. It was a strange thing, yet one which happens often: for we neither live nor die according to our own will and previsions—save sometimes in such a case as that of our painter, to whom, as to his beloved, God accorded sleep.

And more—the coming true of everything that he had believed. After doing his best for his own, and for all who depended upon him in his life, he did better still, as he had foreseen, by dying. Daniells sold the three pictures at prices higher than he had dreamed of, for a Sandford was now a thing with a settled value, it being sure that no new flood of them would ever come into the market. And all went well. Perhaps with some of us, too, that dying which it is a terror to look forward to, seeing that it means the destruction of a home, may prove, like the painter's, a better thing than living even for those who love us best. But it is not to everyone that it is given to die at the right moment, as Mr. Sandford had the happiness to do.

OF DATES.

THE word date is exceedingly ambiguous. It is not what the logicians prettily describe as a univocal term. On the contrary, it is most distinctly and decidedly equivocal. Its equivocation has given rise, indeed, to one of the most marvellous *tours de force* in the way of a sustained and elaborate pun ever perpetrated in the English or any other language. Everybody remembers in the Heathen Chinese how, when Bill Nye and Truthful James go to examine Ah Sin's bland and childlike person, they discover winning cards of various values carefully concealed about that guileless Mongolian's sleeves and bosom. 'And we found on his nails, which were taper,' continues the innocent Caucasian narrator, 'what is frequent on tapers—that's wax.' Now, there is a famous Cambridge Senate-House parody of the Heathen Chinese, which describes the guile and wile of a naughty undergraduate who endeavours to get through his little-go examination on the same general principles as those which actuated poor benighted Ah Sin in his method of playing the game of poker. After describing how the undergraduate has tips of various kinds written upon his cuffs, his finger-nails, his sleeves, and his penholder, the university poet goes on to remark, in strict accordance with the ring of the lines parodied,—

And we found on his palms, which were hollow,
What is frequent on palms—that is dates.

Even as an isolated and original pun, that would be very neat and telling; but when we consider further how admirably the double play upon words is imitated, and the lilt of Bret Harte's verse is preserved in the imitation, the performance rises to absolute high-water mark of the parodying faculty. The man who could dance in such fetters as those would have been not unequal to the task of translating Aristophanes.

The dates wherewith we have here to deal, then, to be quite precise, are not the dates inscribed on the palms of the self-convicted candidate for academical honours, duly registered in Haydn's Dictionary; they are the dates that grow on those other palms which flourish among the allegories on the banks of the

Nile. It is always surprising to me how many articles we all use familiarly in our everyday life, about whose origin and real nature we know nothing or next to nothing. A city man one day was discoursing volubly to me about the recent remarkable fall in the price of fenugreek. 'And pray,' said I, 'what is fenugreek, and what do they use it for?' 'Upon my soul,' said the bold merchant, with a start of surprise, 'I haven't really the faintest notion; but I know it's something you sell by the ton.' (Lest I should seem too unjustifiably to arouse the curiosity of the invariably candid and courteous reader without stepping out of my way a moment to satisfy it, I may add parenthetically that fenugreek, as I found on further inquiry, is a sort of pulse, not unlike a very large clover; that it grows in India, Egypt, and the East; that the seeds yield a bitter and disagreeable oil; that they form an important ingredient in all curry-powders; that they are used to flavour a well-known food for cattle; and that 4*l.* 10*s.* a ton is the current quotation at the present moment for prime Egyptian. And having thus disburdened my soul of its accumulated store of knowledge anent this mysterious fenugreek, I will return once more from my sudden digression to the dates themselves from which I started.)

When we see Best Tafilats duly arranged like herrings in a box in the grocers' windows, we accept at once the fact that they are dates, and usually ask no more about them. But since the date forms the staff of life for large masses of our fellow-creatures, many of whom are now also all but our fellow-subjects, some little consideration of their origin and nature befits the imperial and imperious true-born Briton. For it is one of the peculiarities of our very varied and expanded empire, in these latter days, that in order to govern and administer it properly, our legislators and voters ought to know absolutely everything. They should be versed in monsoons, and rice crops, and metaphysics for India; in sugar-cane, and bananas, and bandanas for Jamaica; in lumber, and ermine, and fall wheat for Canada; in diamonds, and Zulus, and theology for the Cape; in Chinese, and Buddhism, and pigeon-English for Hong-Kong; and in coolies, vacuum-pans, and irrigation for Demerara. They must acquire a permanent squint by keeping one eye firmly fixed on a scientific frontier in Afghanistan, and the other steadily pointed to a Hudson's Bay outlet for the wheat of Manitoba. They must never forget the disaffection of Hyderabad, or go to sleep without

having ascertained beforehand the feelings of the Namaquas, the Maories, and the Blackfoot Indians. Why, the House of Lords alone, in its capacity of final court of appeal, must decide on cases in old French law from Lower Canada, in the Code Napoléon from Mauritius, in Dutch law from the Cape of Good Hope, in Hindoo law from India generally, in Mohammedan law from Bengal and Oudh, in Sikh law from parts of the Punjab, in Singhalese law from Ceylon, in local law from Ontario and Victoria, in Malay law from the Straits Settlements, and, for aught I know to the contrary, in cannibal law from the Fiji Islands and the King Country of New Zealand. 'Enough,' said Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia, to the sage who discoursed to him on the poet's education; 'you have convinced me that no mortal can ever by any possibility become a poet.' How, then, can any mortal ever become, I do not say Prime Minister of England, but even a silent voting member of the imperial Parliament?

Nevertheless, since—let us say—eminent aldermen rush in where angels fear to tread, it is decidedly desirable that every unit in the great central governing oligarchy of our composite empire should at least know something about the fruit which forms the staple product of a country that has already cost us some odd millions, and is likely to cost us before we have done with it as many more. In the name of the Prophet, figs. Or if not figs, then dates at any rate.

The date-palm seems the most paradoxical of trees. It invariably insists upon impossible or at least impracticable combinations of circumstances. It requires a hot dry climate, and yet its roots must have access to abundant moisture. It flourishes best in rainless countries, and yet it can only live by means of natural or artificial irrigation. It will ripen its fruit in Portugal and Andalusia; and yet it refuses to come to perfection in the basking hot summers of Anatolia and Sicily. The fact is, the date-palm really belongs by origin to the desert belt, but even in the desert it grows only among the stray oases where a spring or stream allows a little group of its tall stems to raise their head of feathery branches high into the dry and scorching air. I need not dwell upon this idyllic Eastern picture of the native haunt of the date-palm, for everybody has it stamped indelibly on his memory from the familiar woodcuts of the Sunday-school books that amused or distressed his happy childhood. We know it well, that oasis in the desert: in the foreground stands the conventional

Arab sheikh, in turban and burnous, accompanied by his faithful negro slave and equally faithful double-humped camel; in the background, a stream of marvellous hydraulic pressure gushes up in gurgling flood as though from a street hydrant, while around it a circle of bending date-palms wave over the fountain, and hang down monstrous bunches of ripe dates for the behoof of the Arabian gentleman aforesaid, his suite and cattle. But why an oasis should never sit for its portrait except in the very height of the date season, and during the occasion of a visit from a sheikh with his camels, is a question that has long and unsatisfactorily engaged my attention.

Essentially a desert plant by origin, developed in, for, and by the sandy tracts, the date-palm still grows almost exclusively in the great desert zone of the Eastern Hemisphere. This zone begins in Sahara, and after being barely interrupted by the Nile and the Red Sea, continues across Arabia to the Persian Gulf, where the irrigated Euphrates valley once more intersects it, and finally runs on by Makran and the Indian Desert to the great Tibetan plateau and the sand wastes of Gobi. Along all the dry region thus mapped out the rainfall is very slight, and fertile tracts only occur in the artificially watered alluvial deposits of the great rivers, like the Nile, the Euphrates, the Indus, and the Ganges. This, then, is the true home of the date-palm, the district where it can obtain in many places its pet combination of desert drought above and irrigating springs or streams below. Its native range extends, in short, from North Africa, on the fringes of Sahara, through Arabia and Palestine, to the Indian plains. Mesopotamia is probably its most original home: its western limit is Senegal; its eastern, the Indus. Under exceptional circumstances, however, and in special places, it can be cultivated also in Southern Europe and some parts of Asia Minor, but only where the climate is naturally dry, and where abundant water can be supplied it by irrigating channels. In Portugal it loves the sunny dells among the dry rocks of Lower Estremadura; in Spain it grows luxuriantly along the Andalusian lowlands from Murcia to Alicante, and occasionally ripens good fruit even as far north as Valencia and Oviedo; in the south of Italy and Sicily it flowers well, but seldom brings its berries to perfection; and along the basking shore of the Riviera, between Marseilles and Genoa, it drags out a precarious existence on the promenade at Nice, or grows with greater freedom in the deep alluvial soil of Hyères and of the

Maures Mountains. Its average northern limit, in fact, as Martius and De Candolle have elaborately proved, is about the latitude of Sidon and Morocco, south of which it flourishes vigorously till it is stopped, as Mr. Haldane remarks, by the excessive moisture of the equatorial region.

Dates, to be concise, are conterminous with Mohammedanism. People who have only seen the date-palm on the sandy spit of Bordighera, or among the fashionable gardens of Cannes and Mentone, can form no idea of its beauty and gracefulness when allowed to grow to its natural height, and to drop its leaves in the natural manner among its native deserts.

Nor knew we well what pleased us most,
Not the clipt palm of which they boast,

says Tennyson of the Riviera in that beautiful little holiday excursion of his, 'The Daisy;' and, indeed, the palm is clipped and doctored out of all recognition by the prim and formal taste of French and Italian gardeners. Each year the old leaves are sawn off near the base, and a painfully artificial air is thus given to the mutilated trunks by the cut stumps of the dead foliage. But in its wild and native state the date-palm forms a tall and gracious tree of stately aspect, inferior in beauty, it is true, to the cocoa-nut, and still more to the mountain cabbage-palm, but, with the usual high and slender stem of all its class, surmounted at the top by a tuft or rosette of spreading feathery pinnate leaves, deep green in hue, and from nine to twelve feet long in well-grown specimens. There are some very fine ones, well known to most European tourists, in the gardens and courtyards of Algiers and Oran. In height they sometimes reach as much as eighty feet near running water; and as they live and bear seed for two hundred years, the follower of the Prophet who plants a date-palm may indeed be regarded as labouring for posterity. The trees begin to fruit at seven years old, produce abundantly at twenty, and go on supplying his children's children far on into a second century.

The most interesting item about the date-palm, however, is the fact that it was the first species in which the distinction of sex in plants was ever noticed. As long ago as the days of Herodotus, and doubtless dozens of centuries earlier, the Egyptians and Babylonians knew that the dates could only be fully set by hanging the clusters of male flowers where their pollen could fall upon the female blossoms and impregnate the

ovaries. As usual, this bit of abstract knowledge was earliest acquired where it brought itself to bear upon that universal subject of human sympathy, the question of dinner. Your countryman who knows all other fungi merely in the lump by the common name of toadstools, can discriminate as accurately as a trained fungologist the edible mushroom from all inferior species. Your epicure with the vaguest views as to slugs and snails can safely be trusted, not only to identify that familiar bivalve, *Ostrea edulis*, but even to distinguish between such minor varieties as the Portuguese and the Whitstable native, the Blue-point and the genuine Saddle-rock. And so, too, the distinction of male and female in the date-palm forced itself violently upon the attention of hungry humanity ages before Linnæus had demonstrated the functions of pollen or the arrangement of sexes in the rose and the buttercup.

Most plants, as all the world now knows, have the stamens, which produce the pollen, and the pistil, which contains the embryonic seeds, enclosed in one and the same blossom; though even in such cases provision is usually made for cross-fertilisation by the agency of insects, either because the stamens and pistils do not both mature simultaneously, or because the pollen is so arranged as never to fall naturally upon the sensitive stigma of the unripe capsule. But in a few plants—as, for example, in the common begonia and in box and pellitory—the male and female flowers are quite distinct, though both grow upon the same stem; and in yet others, like the red campion, the hop, and the hautboy strawberry, one plant will produce nothing but barren or stamen-bearing flowers, while another will produce only fertile or fruit-bearing blossoms. In this last case, to which category the date-palm belongs, the sexes are strictly and absolutely separated. Each individual plant of the sort may properly be regarded as a huge phalanstery or community of male or female flowers, for which the bee or other insect acts as go-between.

Now, every separate date-palm is thus either a pollen-bearer or a fruit-producer; and as it is impossible to tell beforehand whether any particular seed will bring forth a male or female plant, the Arabs, who wish of course for fertile palms only, do not usually propagate from seed at all, but prefer to raise their young stock by slips or suckers, taken from the foot of a female tree. During the flowering season they cut off the branches or spikes of blossom from the wild pollen-bearing palms, or from a few cultivated ones

grown for that special purpose, and hang them by the side of the fruit-bearing flowers in their own gardens. The bees and other insects then rapidly and effectually set the fruit, by unconsciously carrying the pollen about on their bodies as they hunt for honey in the adjacent bunches. The account given of this process by Herodotus is just as full and just as correct in principle as any that could be given by a modern botanist. The male flowers grow as a rule somewhat larger than the female, but both are built on the usual palm model, which is in fact merely that of the ordinary lilies a little diverted. Each has six petals, not very brightly coloured, but pale yellowish green in hue, inclosing either six stamens, or else a three-celled ovary, of which two cells have become abortive. The palms, indeed, are arborescent lilies on a large scale; and such tropical species as the yuccas and the dracenas on the one hand, with the sub-tropical palmettos and fan-palms on the other, help in part to bridge over the gulf between the two orders. In other words, under the exceptional conditions of tropical life, certain luxuriant lily-like forms assume the shape and stature of trees, and those trees are what we call palms, marked still by the original lily blossoms, and by the peculiar tufted character of their leaves.

The contrast between the date and the cocoa-nut, both exactly analogous fruits, produced by closely allied and similar trees, marks admirably the way in which purely human and culinary distinctions are allowed to mask for us the actual facts and analogies of nature. For a date and a cocoa-nut are built on precisely the same plan, and answer layer for layer to one another; only the part that we eat in the date is the part that we throw away in the cocoa-nut, and the part that we eat in the cocoa-nut is the part that we throw away in the date. First of all comes an outside fleshy layer, which in the date becomes at last soft and pulpy, while in the cocoa-nut it grows stringier and more fibrous as the fruit ripens; next comes a hard stone or nutshell, alike in both; and inside all lies the kernel or seed, intended in either case to germinate or grow, but eaten in the nut, and thrown away, shell and all, in the date-fruit. Moreover, as the cocoa-nut usually has its outer fibrous layer stripped off before being exposed for sale, most people forget about it altogether; and so the real analogy between the two cases is still more easily overlooked.

But why should the date-palm produce an edible fruit with a pulpy outer covering, while its congener the cocoa-palm produces

a hard-shelled nut with a tough and fibrous outer layer? Simply because the cocoa-palm grows in oceanic islands, while the date-palm grows in desert oases. Cocoas flourish best by the sea-shore, on coral reefs and atolls, within easy reach of the salt-laden breezes. The seeds are wafted hither and thither by winds and waves from island to island; and in no other way, as Darwin and Wallace have shown, could any plant succeed in peopling the widely dispersed archipelagos of the South Pacific and the Malay region. Hence the cocoa-nut requires great floating power, protection from salt water, a hard shell, and an immense stock of nutriment for its tender early years upon the beaches and sandbanks where it is finally tumbled. These requirements are amply met by nature in its fibrous matting, its smooth outer rind, its solid covering, and its rich store of copious albumen. The date-palm, on the other hand, asks for dispersion from oasis to oasis across the open desert, and it lives in regions thickly peopled by baboons and other monkeys. What more natural than to develop a pulpy outer fruit, to entice these unconscious friends, inclosing a very tough and hard shell, which no monkey's teeth can possibly penetrate? For this reason the date has now a sweet and fleshy outer coat, where the cocoa-nut has a light and fibrous external covering; and the well-disposed monkey, climbing the tall stem, and appropriating the fruit, frequently throws away the stone and seed by the water's edge, where it may best take root and grow and flourish. Of course, he throws away millions unheeded on the bare expanse of desert too; but that does not count; Nature always provides against these little accidents. Of a thousand seeds, says the poet with some modesty of statement, she often brings but one to bear. Very well, then, the date-palm will at all costs be even with her. A single tree produces as many as 20,000 dates in one season. Since the object of all these seeds is merely to keep up the usual number of date trees in the world, and since each date tree lives about 200 years, an average of one date well placed out of four millions will be quite sufficient to effect her purpose. As a matter of fact, wherever you find a tiny spring or stream in the desert, there also you find a date-palm. The stones germinate wherever the playful baboon throws them down in wet soil near the source of a river, or even in a damp fissure of the rock. The date-palm uses the monkey to transport its seeds in just the same way as it uses the bee to transfer pollen from blossom to blossom.

This marvellous fecundity of the date-palm, a fecundity in which perhaps it is only rivalled by the banana and the bread-fruit, makes it one of the most valuable foodstuffs known to the countries in which its fruit will ripen. Each tree produces from eight to ten bunches of fruit, and the total yield by weight of a palm in full bearing varies from one hundred to four hundred pounds of dates yearly. An acre of land under dates will feed more people than under any other known crop except plantain. The fruit is gathered before it fully ripens, for if allowed to get ripe it cannot be kept, owing to the rapidity with which it ferments. Common dates are dried in the sun by negro slaves, and then sent to market for local use; the best kind, which are exported to Europe, are cured with a little more show of care; but even the best are badly done, and if the trade were wholly carried on by Europeans instead of by Arabs and Berbers, we should eat much less dirt per bushel of Best Tafilat than we do at present. In these matters 'tis folly to be wise, and I will not harrow the soul of the date-eater by dwelling upon the details of the curative process as performed in Africa. The European market is chiefly supplied from Tunis, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, and Bussorah.

But the date itself by no means exhausts the economic value and properties of the date-palm. Like that sacred animal the pig, which is all useful, from the tip of his snout, cut up for brawn, to the bristles on his tail, employed for tooth-brushes, the date-palm rivals Somebody's tea in being 'all good alike' for something or other. The bark yields a fibre which is employed for ropes, matting, baskets, and sacks. The leaves serve to thatch the Berber's hut, and to make little cases for packing the fruit in. The footstalks boil the family kettle or yabbah, and supply fencing for the cottage garden. The timber takes a good polish for cabinet work, or cut into lengths supplies the ordinary post of the North African circular hut. The unripe dates can be boiled down for vinegar. The ripe fruit, besides being eaten dry, may be made into spirits, or pressed fresh for an agreeable syrup. Finally, the tree can be tapped for toddy, as is done in Algeria with centenarian palms as soon as they attain their hundredth birthday. A gallon of toddy a day can be drawn off for a whole fortnight; after that, the drain is injurious to the tree's constitution.

The sap thus obtained is at first a sweet and pleasant beverage, but the heat of the sun, aided of course by the ubiquitous germ, soon sets up fermentation, and the drink becomes sour, alcoholic,

and intoxicating. Palm wine is the commonest form in which it is drunk. While still sweet it can be boiled down into sugar, like the jaggery of the cocoa-palm; when fermented it can be easily distilled into that fiery and unpleasant spirit known as arrack. Mr. A. R. Wallace believes, indeed, that the wild date-tree will finally supersede the sugar-cane and the beetroot as a producer of sugar. From this necessarily brief and cursory account of the virtues of the date-palm it must be immediately obvious to the meanest comprehension that the Moslem who is lucky enough to possess a grove of them may consider himself practically independent of the remainder of humanity. He may feed himself, clothe himself, warm himself, house himself, furnish his humble cot, and attain to various degrees of pleasing intoxication, vinous or spirituous according to taste, without going beyond the precincts of his own orchard.

Mr. Haldane suggests that the date ought to be extensively planted in the desert interior of the Australian continent. Were it well dispersed there, he believes, it would some day be found of as great value as it now is in the oases of Sahara. Not only does it supply food, shade, and toddy for drink to the belated explorer, but it also marks out from afar by its tall stems and tufted foliage the existence of water in the midst of the desert, and so enables wayfarers to push their way straight across country from spring to spring. A supply of dates, it is suggested, ought to be sent with every expedition into the interior, and every means be taken to disseminate the seeds. Alphonse de Candolle also observed that it might be introduced with advantage into the South African desert and many parts of the Cape of Good Hope. The true difficulty in Australia would be that that oldest of faunas includes no monkeys; and without monkeys the dissemination of the date-palm would probably prove a complete failure. For you must sow the seeds broadcast everywhere over the ground in order that here and there one or two may spring up spontaneously in the best adapted places. True, in the African oases most of the palms have been planted by man, while some even of those which fringe the merest damp spots in the desert, far from the huts of men, may have sprung from stones casually cast away, as De Candolle believes, by passing caravans. But such deliberate planting or accidental dispersion by the hand of man in itself implies long civilisation and a developed transport system, which is just what one has not got and cannot have for many centuries in

Central Australia. Perhaps, however, parrots, of which there are abundance, might successfully take the place of monkeys; and if so the date-palm might advertise all the moist spots and streams in the Australian desert, as it already does in Egypt and Algeria.

A few words about the stray date-palms still to be found in Southern France and Italy may not perhaps be quite out of place in this connection. The date was introduced into the Riviera by the Moorish pirates, liegemen of the good Haroun-al-Raschid, who in the ninth century settled down in that rugged schistose region between Toulon and Fréjus still called after their name, the *Montagnes des Maures*. Here for two or three hundred years they held out as a petty independent Mohammedan principality, surrounded on every side by timid Provençal and Ligurian Christendom. They had their tiny Moslem capital at what is now the unimportant village of Garde Freinet; and all the country side from Hyères to St. Tropez still teems with interesting verbal and material memorials of the Saracen supremacy. African plants and flowers grow to this day in the gardens that fringe the banks of the Béal. Arab words and names abound in the *patois* of the Olbian peasantry. Moorish-looking gateways and quaint houses with blank African walls remain in all the hamlets of the Maures district. And here it is, too, that the date-palm flourishes better than in any other climate north of Sicily. Something African, indeed, reveals itself at once in the very aspect of the arid hill-sides, with their brown cottages packed close against the barren rock: and once at Bormes, in the heart of the little principality, I remember coming upon an ancient date-palm, overshadowing an old adobe hut with a tall mud wall, which looked like a stray little bit of Algeria transplanted to the wrong side of the Mediterranean. 'The Arabs who occupied this petty canton in the tenth and eleventh century,' says M. Elie de Beaumont, 'might easily be excused for still imagining themselves to be living in Africa.'

La Garde Freinet itself, the Castellum Fraxinetum of mediæval historians, where in the ninth century the Saracen corsairs established their head-quarters, also still retains several fine specimens of ancient palm trees. The Arabs built there a splendid fortress, known as Les Tours; and from this impregnable stronghold they sent on their booty to the African coast by the port of St. Tropez. Nowadays La Garde lies far remote from the ways of tourists, on the cross-country road from Cogolin to Le Luc; but the stranger from Northern Europe who has never seen sub-tropical vegetation

in its full perfection should make a pilgrimage to the ruins of the château in order to see the waving date-palms still clinging to the last reminiscence of their Saracen planters.

From La Garde Freinet the date-palm spread first to Hyères, where some really fine specimens grow in the valley below the town and on the Place des Palmiers, and afterwards to Nice, Cannes, San Remo, Mentone, and Bordighera, at which latter place exists the finest plantation of these trees in any part of Europe. M. Adolphe Joanne calls it 'une vaste forêt de palmiers;' but then M. Joanne, for all his erudition, is sometimes seized with the enthusiasm of the guide-book writer. These palms are grown for commercial purposes, and form the chief item in the export trade of Bordighera. Not, of course, for the dates: the fruit never ripens so far north in Italy; they are valued entirely for the sake of their foliage, which is sent to Paris, to Rome, and even to Holland, for the processions and decorations on Palm Sunday. All the gardens and fields about Bordighera are full of palms, which are carefully cultivated with a unique eye to the safety of the leaves, the terminal panicle being painfully tied up with string and rope, so that the wind may not dash together the precious branches, and in their earlier stage are protected with netting, so that dust and rain may not soil or darken them. Ever since the days of Sixtus V. Bordighera has possessed the prescriptive right of furnishing St. Peter's with the branches used on Palm Sunday, and a local legend attributes the privilege to services rendered by a Bordigheran during the elevation of the Egyptian obelisk which stands in the centre of the colonnade before the great central cathedral of Catholic Christendom. It is more probable that Bordighera has a monopoly of palms because its sandy soil and dry atmosphere are better fitted to the natural habits of the plant than those of any other suitable spot along the North Mediterranean.

It is in the East alone, however, that the date-palm can be seen in all its glory. One gets it well enough at Mustapha Supérieur and at the Hôtel de l'Algérie; but Cairo and Alexandria are its proper home; and as for Bagdad, our entire ideal of the Arabian Nights is simply overshadowed by the waving and whispering branches of the mysterious palm trees. The East depends upon them for its bare identity. Without the cocoa-nut, there could be no tropics: without the date-palm, there can be no Orient. When we look at a brilliantly lighted picture of a mud-

built mosque, all blank walls, and beehive domes, and pointed minarets, with a muezzin solemnly calling the faithful to prayer from his aerial watch-tower, and a couple of tall and stately palms in the full foreground, we know at once the artist means us to see we are in Lower Syria or the Euphrates valley. When we recognise an islet by a river side, with a massive ruined colonnade in the near distance, a grave Oriental mounted on a donkey by an arched gateway, a couple of camels heavily laden, and a bower of tall foliage on a slender trunk, a little on one side, to give it all the proper local colouring, we know at once we are on the banks of the Nile, and within full view of Karnak or of Luxor. Whatever else the picture may contain, it cannot afford to do without the date-palm. That is the painter's way of saying, 'Observe; there's no deception: this is the genuine Eastern article.' As well think of painting the desert without a camel as of painting an Egyptian or Oriental scene without the aid of that overarching foliage. I have seen a sketch in Egypt which neglected the Pyramids; I have known such drawings to omit the obelisks, to forget the mosques, to avoid the dahabeeyas, to slight the sphinx, to ignore the Memnon, to commit high sacrilege against the sacred scarabæus; I have gone without the ibis, the hieroglyphs, the cataracts, and the turbans: but if a young painter were to do me a scene at Cairo or a view near Syene without the date-palms, I should immediately refuse to accept his picture as up to the terms of my original commission, and insist upon his painting in at least a tiny palm in the dim distance, that the world might know what it was really looking at.

WITH THE DUKE.

'STOLE AWAY—stole away!' from the gorse in the hollow,
 Old stealthy dog-fox, with thy long lurching stride!
 'Yoicks—forward!' my beauties, swoop swift as a swallow;
 Hark! the thunder of horse-hoofs; sit down, man, and ride.

See Gaylad and Rector are climbing the heather,
 The first flight skim over the wall with a rush;
 'Hold hard, sir—a check!' by the hedgerow they feather,
 Red Reynard will make a good fight for his brush!

Enchanter has hit it, with musical whimper,
 O silver-tongued chime swelling into a peal;
 Adonis' lips lose their exquisite simper,
 'Mid the crash of the timber, his nerves are as steel.

Gallant horse, gentle-eyed, all thy silky mane flying,
 Each touch on thy bit is a lover's caress;
 Never fear, his fine ear is not deaf to thy sighing,
 He will watch in each stride any note of distress.

You may rave as you like of the wild thrill of pleasure,
 When 'neath balloon mainsail the yacht swings along;
 When white-satined feet glide in rhythmical measure,
 Praise the glow of the wine-flask, the glamour of song.

I know the mad pulse of the Racing Eights' oarblades,
 The roar from the bank as she forges ahead;
 The clang of the squadron, the play of the swordblades,
 And 'neath the red hoofs, the pale face of our dead.

‘ Killed in action, and leading his men,’ he is lying,
Fearless soldier and horseman, true brother and friend ;
Where the Dervish, white-cloaked, o’er the desert is flying ;
Such a poor petty skirmish ! Was *this* thy life’s end ?

Not so ! When the Duke calls us out in November,
And we meet on the Lawn, we shall miss thy frank face ;
Full many a comrade with grief will remember
Thy riderless horse, the bright smile of thy race.

Lovely eyes will be dim as we tell thy proud story,
When we race o’er the pastures and charge the stiff rail ;
We shall wish we’d been there, but to share in thy glory ;
When they breathe thy dear name, brave men’s lips will be pale.

‘ Hark forward ! ’—ride straight, Manhood, think not of craning ;
Take life as you find it—’tis better to die
With the hounds in full cry, while the horses are straining,
And on, to life’s finish, the scent lies breast-high.

A LIFE'S MORNING.

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'DEMOS,' 'THYRZA,' ETC.

CHAPTER IX.

CIRCUMSTANCE.

DAGWORTHY was absent not quite a fortnight, and he returned looking anything but the better for his holiday. The wholesome colour of his cheeks had changed almost to sallowness; those who met him in Dunfield looked at him with surprise and asked what illness he had been suffering. At the mill, they did not welcome his re-appearance; his temper was worse than it had been since the ever-memorable week which witnessed his prosecution for assault and battery. At home, the servants did their best to keep out of his way, warned by Mrs. Jenkins. She, good woman, had been rash enough to bring the child into the dining-room whilst Dagworthy was refreshing himself with a biscuit and a glass of wine upon his arrival; in a minute or two she retreated in high wrath.

'Let him dom me, if he loikes,' she went away exclaiming; 'ah'm ovver auld to care much abaht such fond tantrums; but when he gets agaate o' dommin his awn barn, it fair maaks my teeth dither ageean. The lad's aht on his 'ead.'

That was seven o'clock in the evening. He dined an hour later, and when it was dark left the house. Between then and midnight he was constantly in and out, and Mrs. Jenkins, who was kept up by her fears that 't' master' was seriously unwell, made at length another attempt to face him. She knocked at the door of the sitting-room, having heard him enter a minute or two before; no answer was vouchsafed, so she made bold to open the door. Dagworthy was sitting with his head upon the table, his arms stretched out; he appeared to be asleep.

'Mr. Richard!' she said softly. 'Mr. Richard!'

He looked up. 'Well? What is it?'

'Yo' scahr'd me; ah thowt summat 'ad come to yo'. What's wrong wi' yo', Mr. Richard? You look as if you could hardly hod your heead up.'

To her surprise he spoke quite calmly.

'Yes, I've got a bit of a headache. Get me some hot water, will you? I'll have some brandy and go to bed.'

She began to advise other remedies, but Dagworthy speedily checked her.

'Get me some hot water, I tell you, and go to bed yourself. What are you doing up at this hour?'

He went to business at the usual time next morning, and it seemed as if the worst had blown over; at home he was sullen, but not violent.

The third day after his return, on entering his office at the mill, he found Hood taking down one of a row of old ledgers which stood there upon a shelf.

'What are you doing?' he asked, abruptly, at the same time turning his back upon the clerk.

Hood explained that he was under the necessity of searching through the accounts for several years, to throw light upon a certain transaction which was giving trouble.

'All right,' was the reply, as Dagworthy took his keys out to open his desk.

A quarter of an hour later, he entered the room where Hood was busy over the ledger. A second clerk was seated there, and him Dagworthy summoned to the office, where he had need of him. Presently Hood came to replace the ledger he had examined, and took away the succeeding volume. A few minutes later Dagworthy said to the clerk who sat with him—

'I shall have to go away for an hour or so. I'm expecting a telegram from Legge Brothers; if it doesn't come before twelve o'clock, you or Hood must go to Hebsworth. It had better be Hood; you finish what you're at. If there's no telegram, he must take the twelve-thirteen, and give this note here to Mr. Andrew Legge; there'll be an answer. Mind you see to this.'

At the moment when Dagworthy's tread sounded on the stairs, Mr. Hood was on the point of making a singular discovery. In turning a page of the ledger, he came upon an envelope, old and yellow, which had evidently been shut up in the book for several years; it was without address and unsealed. He was going to lay it aside, when his fingers told him that it contained something; the enclosure proved to be a ten-pound note, also old and patched together in the manner of notes that have been sent half at a time.

'Now I wonder how that got left there?' Hood mused. 'There's been rare searching for that, I'll be bound. Here's something to put our friend into a better temper.'

He turned the note over once or twice, tried in vain to decipher a scribbled endorsement, then restored it to the envelope. With the letter in his hand, he went to the office.

'Mr. Dagworthy out?' he asked of his fellow-clerk on looking round.

The clerk was a facetious youth. He rose from his seat, seized a ruler, and began a species of sword-play about Hood's head, keeping up a grotesque dance the while. Hood bore it with his wonted patience, smiling faintly.

'Mr. Dagworthy out?' he repeated, as soon as he was free from apprehension of a chance crack on the crown.

'He is, my boy. And what's more, there's a chance of your having a spree in Hebsworth. Go down on your knees and pray that no telegram from Foot Brothers—I mean, Legge—arrives during the next five-and-twenty minutes.'

'Why?'

'If not, you're to takee this notee to Brother Andrew Leggee,—comprenez? The boss was going to send me, but he altered his mind, worse luck.'

'Twelve-thirteen?' asked Hood.

'Yes. And now if you're in the mind, I'll box you for half a dollar—what say?'

He squared himself in pugilistic attitude, and found amusement in delivering terrific blows which just stopped short of Hood's prominent features. The latter beat a retreat.

Twelve o'clock struck, and no telegram had arrived; neither had Dagworthy returned to the mill. Hood was indisposed to leave the envelope to be given by other hands; he might as well have the advantage of such pleasure as the discovery would no doubt excite. So he put it safely in his pocket-book, and hastened to catch the train, taking with him the paper of sandwiches which represented his dinner. These he would eat on the way to Hebsworth.

It was a journey of ten miles, lying at first over green fields, with a colliery vomiting blackness here and there, then through a region of blight and squalor, finally over acres of smoke-fouled streets, amid the roar of machinery; a journey that would have crushed the heart in one fresh from the breath of heaven on

sunny pastures. It was a slow train, and there were half a dozen stoppages. Hood began to eat his sandwiches at a point where the train was delayed for a few minutes by an adverse signal; a coal-pit was close by, and the smoke from the chimney blew in at the carriage windows, giving a special flavour to the bread and meat. There was a drunken soldier in the same compartment, who was being baited by a couple of cattle-drovers with racy vernacular not to be rendered by the pen. Hood munched his smoky sandwich, and with his sad eyes watched the great wheel of the colliery revolve, and the trucks rise and descend. The train moved on again. The banter between the other three passengers was taking an angry turn; to escape the foul language as far as possible, Hood kept his head at the window. Of a sudden the drunken soldier was pushed against him, and before he could raise his hands, his hat had flown off on the breeze.

He turned round with angry remonstrance. The soldier had fallen back on to the seat, and was grinning inanely; the drovers were enjoying the joke beyond measure.

'Theer, lad!' one of them cried. 'Tha's doon it nah! Tha'll a' to buy him a new 'at for his 'ead, soon as we get i'to Hebs'orth.'

'Appen he's got no brass,' suggested the other, guffawing.

It was the case; the soldier had a copper or two at most. The drovers of course held themselves free of responsibility. Hood felt in his own pocket; but he was well aware that a shilling and three half-pence was all he carried with him—save the banknote in his pocket-book. Yet it was impossible to go through Hebsworth with uncovered head, or to present himself hatless at the office of Legge Brothers. Already the train was slackening speed to enter the station. Would any hatter trust him, on his representing whence he came? He feared not. Not the least part of his trouble was the thought of having to buy a new hat at all; such an expense was ill to be borne just now. Of course—he said to himself, with dreary fatalism—a mishap is sure to come at the worst time. It was the experience of his life.

Hood was a shy man; it was misery to have attention drawn to himself as it naturally would be as soon as he stepped out on to the platform. But there was no help; with a last angry look at the drunken soldier, he nerved himself to face the ordeal. As he walked hurriedly out of the crowd, the cry 'Cab, sir?' fell upon his ears. Impossible to say how he brought himself to such a

pitch of recklessness, but in a moment he was seated in a hansom, having bidden the driver take him to the nearest hatter's. The agony of embarrassment has driven shy men to strange audacities, but who ever dared more than this? *He would be compelled to change the note!*

Whatever might be the cause, whether it was the sudden sense of refuge from observation, or the long unknown pleasure of riding in a cab, as he sped along the streets he grew almost merry; at length he positively laughed at the adventure which had befallen him. It mattered nothing whether he gave Dagworthy the money in a note or in change, and, on being told the story, his employer might even feel disposed to pay for the hat. He *would* pay for the hat! By the time the cab drew up, Hood had convinced himself of this. He was in better spirits than he had been for many a day.

'Can you change me a ten-pound note?' were his first words to the hatter. 'If you can't, I must go elsewhere; I have nothing smaller.'

The salesman hesitated.

'You want a silk hat?'

'Yes, but not an expensive one.'

A pen was brought, and Hood was requested to endorse the note. What security—under the circumstances—such a proceeding could give, the hatter best knew; he appeared satisfied, and counted out his sovereigns. Hood paid the cabman, and walked off briskly towards the office of Legge Brothers.

He stopped, in the middle of the pavement, as if a shot had struck him. Supposing Dagworthy had no recollection of a ten-pound note having been lost, nor of any note having been lost; and supposing it occurred to him that he, Hood, had in reality found a larger sum, had invented the story of the lost hat, and was returning a portion only of his discovery, to gain the credit of honesty? Such an idea could only possess the brain of a man whose life had been a struggle amid the chicaneries and despicabilities of commerce; who knew that a man's word was never trusted where there could enter the slightest suspicion of an advantage to himself in lying; whose daily terror had been lest some error, some luckless chance, should put him within the nets of criminality. It is the deepest curse of such a life as his that it directs the imagination in channels of meanness, and pre-occupies the thought with sordid fears. What would it avail him,

in the present instance, to call the shopman to witness? The note, ten to one, would be paid away, and here also a man's word was worth nothing. But Dagworthy might merely think such an accusation: aye, that would be the worst. To lie henceforth under suspicion of dishonesty: that meant, to lose his place before long, on some pretence.

And he felt that, in spite of absolute sincerity, he could not stand before Dagworthy and tell his tale with the face and voice of an honest man,—felt it with a horrible certainty. In a man of Hood's character, this state of mind was perfectly natural. Not only was he weakly constructed, but his incessant ill-fortune had done him that last wrong which social hardship can inflict upon the individual, it had undermined his self-respect. Having been so often treated like a dog, he had come to expect such treatment, and, what was worse, but feebly to resent it. He had lost the conscious dignity of manhood; nay, had perhaps never possessed it, for his battle had begun at so early an age. The sense that he was wretchedly poor, and the knowledge that poverty is the mother of degradation, made him 'at any moment a self-convicted criminal; accused, however wrongly, it was inevitable that his face should be against him. To go to Dagworthy with sovereigns in his hand, and this story upon his lips, would be to invite suspicion by every strongest sign of guilt.

I am representing the poor fellow's thoughts and feelings. Whether or not Dagworthy would really entertain such a suspicion is quite another matter. For the first time in his life, Hood had used for his own purposes money which did not belong to him; he did it under the pressure of circumstances, and had not time to reflect till the act was irrevocable. Then this horror came upon him. Forgetting his errand, he drew aside into a quieter street, and struggled with his anguish. Do you laugh at him for his imbecility? Try first to understand him.

But his business must be performed; with trembling limbs he hurried onwards, and at length reached the office of Legge Brothers. The member of the firm to whom the note which he bore was addressed had but a few minutes ago left the place; he would return within an hour. How could the time be spent? He began to wander aimlessly about the streets. In passing a spot where scaffolding was erected before new buildings, the wish entered his mind that something might fall and crush him. He thought of such an end as a blessed relief.

A hand was laid upon his shoulder, and at the touch his heart leaped as though it would burst his side. He turned and, with starting eyes, glared at the man before him, a perfect stranger, he thought.

‘Is it? Or isn’t it? Hood, or his ghost?’

The man who spoke was of the shabbiest appearance, wearing an almost napless high hat, a coloured linen shirt which should have been at the laundress’s, no neck-tie, a frock-coat with only one button, low shoes terribly down at heel; for all that, the most jovial-looking man, red-nosed, laughing. At length Hood was capable of recognising him.

‘Cheeseman! Well, who on earth would have expected to meet you!’

‘I’ve followed you half along the street; couldn’t be sure. Afraid I startled you at last, old friend.’

They had known each other as young men, and it was now ten years at least since they had met. They were companions in ill-hap, the difference between them being that Cheeseman bore the buffets of the world with imperturbable good humour; but then he had neither wife nor child, kith nor kin. He had tried his luck in all parts of England and in several other countries; casual wards had known him, and he had gained a supper by fiddling in the streets. Many a beginning had he made, but none led to anything; he seemed, in truth, to enjoy a haphazard existence. If Cheeseman had possessed literary skill, the story of his life from his own hand would have been invaluable; it is a misfortune that the men who are richest in ‘material’ are those who would never dream of using it.

They were passing a public-house; Cheeseman caught his friend by the arm and, in spite of resistance, drew him in.

‘Two threes of gin hot,’ was his order. ‘The old drink, Hood, my boy; the drink that has saved me from despair a thousand times.’ How many times have you and I kept up each other’s pecker over a three of gin! You don’t look well; you’ve wanted old Cheeseman to cheer you up. Things bad? Why, damn it, of course things are bad; when were they anything else with you and me, eh? Your wife, how is she? Remember me to her, will you? She never took to me, but never mind that. And the little girl? How’s the little girl? Alive and well, please God?’

‘Rather more than a little girl now,’ returned Hood. ‘And

doing well, I'm glad to say. She's a governess; has an excellent place in London.'

'You don't say so? I never was so glad to hear anything in my life! Ah, but, Hood, you're leaving me behind, old friend; with the little girl doing so well you can't call yourself a poor devil; you can't, upon my soul. I ought to have married; yes, I should ha' married long ago; it 'ud a' been the making of me. It's the sole speculation, I do believe, that I haven't tried. Ah, but I've got something before me now! What say you to a patent fire-escape that any man can carry round his waist? Upon my soul, I've got it! I'm going to London about it as soon as I can get my fare; and that I shall have to-morrow, please God.'

'What brings you to Hebsworth?'

'I don't care much to talk about it in a public place,' replied Cheeseman, with caution which contrasted comically with his loud tone hitherto. 'Only a little matter, but—— Well, we'll say nothing about it; I may communicate with you some day. And you? Do you live here?'

Hood gave an account of his position. Under the influence of the glass of spirits, and of the real pleasure it gave him to see one of the very few men he had ever called friend, he had cast aside his cares for the moment. They went forth presently from the bar, and, after a few paces, Cheeseman took his friend by the coat collar and drew him aside, as if to impart a matter of consequence.

'Two threes of gin!' he said, with a roll of the eye which gave his face a singularly humorous expression. 'That's sixpence. A tanner, Hood, was the last coin I possessed. It was to have purchased dinner, a beefsteak pudding, with cabbage and potatoes; but what o' that? When you and I meet, we drink to old times; there's no getting out of that.'

Hood laughed, for once in a really natural way. His usual abstemiousness made the gin potent.

'Why,' he said, 'I confess to feeling hungry myself; I've only had a sandwich. Come along; we'll have dinner together.'

'You mean it, old friend?' cried the other, with irrepressible delight.

'Of course I mean it. You don't think I'll let you spend your last coin, and send you off dinnerless? Things are bad, but not quite as bad as that. I'm as hungry as a hunter; where is there an eating-house?'

They found one at a little distance.

'It must be beefsteak pudding, Hood,' whispered Cheeseman, as they entered. 'I've set my heart on that. Whatever else you like, but a beefsteak pudding to start with.'

The article was procurable, smoking, juicy. Cheeseman made an incision, then laid down his knife and gloated over his plate.

'Hood,' he said, with much solemnity, 'you've done me many a kindness, old friend, but this caps all. I'm bound to you for life and death. I should have wandered about these streets a starving man.'

The other laughed still; he had a fit of laughter on him; he had not laughed so since he was young.

'Stout and mild is my drink, Hood,' remarked Cheeseman, suggestively. 'It has body, and I need the support.'

They each had a pint, served in the native pewter. When Cheeseman had taken a deep draught he leaned forward across the table.

'Hood, I don't forget it; never you believe that I forget it, however appearances may be against me?'

'Forget what?—give me the mustard, as soon as you can spare it; ha, ha!'

'That ten-pound note!'

Hood dropped his knife and fork.

'What on earth's up? You look just like you did when I clapped you o' the shoulder. Your nerves are out of order, old friend.'

'Why, so they are. I know now what you mean; I couldn't for the life of me think what you were talking about.'

'Don't think I forget it,' pursued the other, after a mouthful.

'It's twelve years last Easter since you lent me that ten-pound note, and it's been on my conscience ever since. But I shall repay it; never you fear but I'll repay it. Did I mention a fire-escape that any man can wear round his waist? Hush! wait a month or two. Let me make a note of your address whilst I think of it. This pudding's hot, but it's a fault on the right side, and time'll mend it. You wouldn't mind, I daresay, being my agent for Dunfield—for the fire-escape, you know? I'll communicate with you, don't fear.'

A hot meal in the middle of the day was a luxury long unknown to Hood. Now and again the thought of what he was doing flashed across him, but mere bodily solace made his con-

science dull. As the meal proceeded he even began to justify himself. Was he never to know an hour's enjoyment? Was his life to be unbroken hardship? What if he had borrowed a few shillings without leave; somehow difficulties would be got over; why, at the very worst, Emily would gladly lend him a pound. He began to talk of Emily, to praise her, to wax warm in the recounting of her goodness, her affection. What man living had so clever and so loving a daughter!

'It's what I said, Hood,' put in Cheeseman, with a shake of the head. 'You've left me behind. You've got into smooth water. The old partnership of ill-luck is broken up. Well, well! I ought to have married. It's been my one mistake in life.'

'Why, it's none too late yet,' cried Hood, merrily.

'None too late! Powers defend us! What have I got to marry on?'

'But the fire-escape?'

'Yes, yes, to be sure; the fire escape! Well, we'll see; wait till things are set going. Perhaps you're right; perhaps it isn't too late. And, Hood——'

'Well?'

'You couldn't manage one single half-crown piece, could you? To be sure there's always an archway to be found, when night comes on, but I can't pretend to like it. I always try to manage a bed at least once a week—no, no, not if there's the least difficulty. Times are hard, I know. I'd rather say not another word about it.'

'Nonsense; take the half-crown and have done with it. Why, you've cheered me up many a half-crownsworth; I feel better than I did. Don't I look it? I feel as if I'd some warmth in my body. What say you, Cheeseman? *One* half-pint more?'

'Come, come, old friend; that's speaking feelingly. You shouldn't try me in that way, you know. I shouldn't like to suggest a pint, with a scrap of cheese. Eh? No, no; follow your own counsel, boy; half a pint be it.'

But the suggestion was accepted. Then at length it occurred to Hood that time must be wearing away; he spoke of the obligation he was under to finish his business and return to Dunfield as soon as possible. Cheeseman declared himself the last man to stand in the way of business. They left the eating-house and walked together part of the way to the office of Legge Brothers.

'Old friend, I'm grateful to you,' said Cheeseman, when at length they parted. 'I've got your address, and you shall hear from me; I've a notion it won't be so long before we meet again. In any case it's another day to look back upon; I little thought of it when I spent twopence-halfpenny on my breakfast this morning, and left sixpence for dinner. It's a rum world, eh, Hood? Good-bye, and God bless you!'

Hood hurried on to the office, received his reply, and proceeded to the station. He had more than half an hour to wait for a train. He took a seat in the waiting-room, and began to examine the money in his pocket, to ascertain exactly the sum he would have to replace. The deficit amounted to a little less than eighteen shillings. After all, it was very unlikely that Dagworthy would offer to bear the expense of the lost hat. Say that a pound had to be restored.

He was in the comfortable mood, following upon unusual indulgence of the appetite, in which the mind handles in a free and easy way the thoughts it is wont to entertain with unquestioning gravity; when it has, as it were, a slippery hold on the facts of life, and constructs a subjective world of genial accommodations. A pound to restore; on the other hand, nine pounds in pocket. The sight of the sovereigns was working upon his imagination, already touched to a warmer life than was its habit. Nine pounds would go a long way towards solving the financial difficulties of the year; it would considerably more than replace the lacking rent of the house in Barnhill; would replace it, and pay as well the increased rent of the house at Banbrigg for twelve months to come. Looked at in this way, the money became a great temptation.

His wife—how explain to her such a windfall? For it was of course impossible to use it secretly. There was a way, seemingly of fate's providing. If only he could bring himself to the lie direct and shameless.

After all, a lie that would injure no mortal. As far as Dagworthy was concerned, the money had long since become the property of nobody; Dagworthy did not even know that this sum existed; if ever missed, it must have been put out of mind long ago. And very possibly it had never belonged to Dagworthy; some cashier or other clerk might just as well have lost it. Hood played with these speculations. He did not put to himself the plain alternative: Shall I keep the money, or shall I give it up?

He merely let a series of reflections pass over his mind, as he lay back on the cushioned seat, experiencing an agreeable drowsiness. At the moment of finding the note, he would have handed it over to his employer without a thought; it would perhaps not even have occurred to him to regret that it was not his own. But during the last three hours a singular chain of circumstances had led to this result: it was just as possible as not that Hood would keep the coins in his pocket and say nothing about them.

It was time to go to the train. Almost with the first moving of the carriages, he fell into a doze. A sense of mental uneasiness roused him now and then, but only for a few moments together; he slumbered on till Dunfield was reached.

At the entrance to the mill, he was in fierce conflict with himself. As is usually the case in like circumstances, the sleepy journey had resulted in bodily uneasiness; he had a slight headache, was thirsty, felt indisposed to return to work. When he had all but crossed the threshold, he turned sharply back, and entered a little public-house a few yards away; an extraordinary thing for him to do, but he felt that a small glass of spirits would help him to quieter nerves, or at all events would sustain his unusual exhilaration till the interview with Dagworthy was over. At the very door of the office he had not decided whether it should be silence or restitution.

‘That you, Hood?’ Dagworthy asked, looking up from a letter he was writing. ‘Been rather a long time, haven’t you?’

The tone was unusually indulgent. Hood felt an accession of confidence; he explained naturally the cause of his delay.

‘All right,’ was the reply, as Dagworthy took the note which his correspondent had sent.

Hood was in his own room, and—the money was still in his pocket. . . .

He did not set out to walk home with his usual cheerfulness that evening. His headache had grown worse, and he wished, wished at every step he took, that the lie he had to tell to his wife was over and done with. There was no repentance of the decision which, it seemed on looking back, he had arrived at involuntarily. The coin which made his pocket heavy meant joy to those at home, and, if he got it wrongfully, the wrong was so dubious, so shadowy, that it vanished in comparison with the good that would be done. It was not—he said to himself—as if he

had committed a theft to dissipate the proceeds, like that young fellow who ran away from the Dunfield and County Bank some months ago, and was caught in London with disreputable associates. Here was a ten-pound note lying, one might say, by the very roadside, and it would save a family from privation. Abstractly, it was wrong; yes, it was wrong; but would abstract right feed him and pay his rent for the year to come? Hood had reached this stage in his self-examination; he strengthened himself by protest against the order of things. His headache nursed the tendency to an active discontent, to which, as a rule, his temperament did not lend itself.

But there remained the telling of the lie. How he wished that Emily were not at home! To lie before Emily, that was the hardest part of his self-imposed task. He could not respect his wife, but before Emily, since her earliest companionship with him, he had watched his words scrupulously; as a little girl she had so impressed him with the purity of her heart that his love for her had been the nearest approach he ever knew to the spirit of worship; and since her attainment of mental and moral independence, his reverence for her had not been unmixed with awe. When her eyes met his, he felt the presence of a nature indefinitely nobler than his own; not seldom he marvelled in his dim way that such a one called him father. Could he ever after this day approach her with the old confidence? Nay, he feared her. His belief in her insight was almost a superstition. Would she not read the falsehood upon his face?

Strange state of mind; at one and the same time he wished that he had thought of Emily sooner, and was glad that he had not. That weight in his pocket was after all a joyous one, and to have been conscious of Emily as he now was, might—would—have made him by so much a poorer man.

She, as usual, was at the door to meet him, her face even gladder than its wont, for this morning there had been at the post-office a letter from Switzerland. How she loved that old name of Helvetia, printed on the stamps! Wilfrid wrote with ever fuller assurance that his father's mind was growing well-disposed, and Emily knew that he would not tell her other than the honest truth. For Wilfrid's scrupulous honesty she would have vouched as—for her father's.

'You look dreadfully worn-out,' she said, as Hood bent his head in entering.

'I am, dear. I have been to Hebsworth, among other things.'

'Then I hope you had dinner there?'

He laughed.

'I should think I had!'

It was one of Mrs. Hood's bad days; she refused to leave the kitchen. Emily had tried to cheer her during the afternoon, but in vain. There had been a misunderstanding with the next-door neighbour, that lady having expressed herself rather decidedly with regard to an incursion made into her premises by the Hoods' cat.

'She speaks to me as if I was a mere working-woman,' Mrs. Hood exclaimed, when Emily endeavoured to soothe her. 'Well, and what else am I, indeed? There was a time when no one would have ventured to speak so.'

'Mother, how can you be troubled by what such a woman says?'

'Yes, I know I am in the wrong, Emily; you always make me see that.'

So Emily had retreated to the upper room, and Mrs. Hood, resenting neglect more even than contradiction, was resolved to sit in the kitchen till bed-time.

Hood was glad when he heard of this.

'If you'll pour out my tea, Emily,' he said in an under tone, 'I'll go and speak to mother for a few moments. I have news that will please her.'

He went into the kitchen and, in silence, began to count sovereigns down upon the table, just behind his wife, who sat over some sewing and had not yet spoken. At the ring of each coin his heart throbbed painfully. He fully realised, for the first time, what he had done.

At the ring of the fifth sovereign Mrs. Hood turned her head.

'What's that?' she asked snappishly.

He went on counting till the nine were displayed.

'What is it?' she repeated. 'Why do you fidget me so?'

'You'd never guess,' Hood answered, laughing hoarsely. 'I had to go to Hebsworth to-day, and who ever do you think I met there? Why, old Cheeseman.'

He paused.

'And he—no, I'll never believe he paid his debt!' said his wife with bitter congratulation. For years the name of Cheeseman had been gall upon her tongue; even now she had not

entirely ceased to allude to him, when she wished to throw especial force of sarcasm into a reminiscence of her earlier days. A woman's powers in the direction of envenomed memory are terrible.

'You have said it,' was Hood's reply under his breath. 'It was providential. What did I do, but go and lose my hat out of the window of the train—had it knocked off by a drunken fellow, in fact. But for this money I should have gone about Hebsworth bare-headed, and come home so, too.'

'A new hat! There's a pretty penny gone! Well, it's too much to hope that any good luck should come without bad at the same time.'

'Well, now you won't fret so much about the rent, Jane?'

He laid his hand upon her shoulder. It was a movement of tenderness such as had not come to him for years; he felt the need of sympathy; he could have begged her to give him a kind look. But she had resumed her sewing; her fingers were not quite steady, that was all.

He left the money on the table and went to Emily in the sitting-room. She was sitting at the table waiting for him with her kindly eyes.

'And what has the wise woman been doing all day?' he asked, trying in vain to overcome that terrible fluttering at his side which caught his breath and made him feel weak.

They talked for some minutes, then footsteps were heard approaching from the kitchen. Mrs. Hood entered with her sewing—she always took the very coarsest for such days as this—and sat at a little distance from the table. As the conversation had nothing to do with Cheeseman's debt, she grew impatient.

'Have you told Emily?' she asked.

'No, I haven't. You shall do that.'

Hood tried to eat the while; the morsels became like saw-dust in his mouth, and all but choked him. He tried to laugh; the silence which followed his effort was ghastly to him.

'You see, it never does to believe too ill of a man,' he said, when he found Emily's look upon him.

Mrs. Hood grew more at her ease, and, to his relief, began to talk freely. Emily tortured him by observing that he had no appetite. He excused himself by telling of his dinner in Hebsworth, and, as soon as possible, left the table. He went upstairs and hoped to find solitude for a time in the garret.

Emily joined him, however, before long. At her entrance he caught up the first bottle his hand fell upon, and seemed to be examining it.

‘What is that?’ Emily asked, noticing his intentness, which in reality had no meaning.

‘This? Oh, cyanide of potassium. I was looking—no, it’s nothing. Will you read me something for half an hour, Emily?’

By this means he would avoid talking, and he knew that the girl was always delighted by the request. She generally read poetry of a kind she thought might touch him, longing to establish more of intellectual sympathy between him and herself. So she did to-night. Hood scarcely followed after the first line; he became lost in feverish brooding. When she laid the volume down, he looked up and held out his hand to her. She, at all events, would not disregard his caress; indeed, Emily took the hand and kissed it.

Then began one of the more intimate conversations which sometimes took place between them. Emily was driven now and then to endeavour to make clear to him her inner life, to speak of her ideals, her intellectual convictions. He listened always with an air of deep humility, very touching in a parent before a child. Her meaning was often dark to his sight, but he strove hard to comprehend, and every word she uttered had for him a gospel sanction. To-night his thoughts strayed; her voice was nothing but the reproach of his own soul; the high or tender words were but an emphasis of condemnation, reiterated, pitiless. She was speaking thus out of her noble heart to him—him, the miserable hypocrite; he pretended to listen and to approve. His being was a loathed burden.

If she had spoken thus last night, surely her voice would have dwelt with him through the hour of temptation. Oh, could it not be morning again, and the day yet to live? The clock below wheezed out nine strokes as if in answer.

CHAPTER X.

AT THE SWORD'S POINT.

DAGWORTHY in these days could scarcely be deemed a man, with humanity's plenitude of interacting motives, of contrasting impulses, of varying affections. He was become one passion, a personified appetite. He went through his routine, at the mill and elsewhere, in a mechanical way; all the time his instincts and habits subjugated themselves to the frenzy which chafed at the centres of his life. In his face you saw the monomaniac. His eyes were bloodshot; his lips had a parched yellowness of tone; his skin seemed dry and burning. Through the day he talked, gave orders, wrote letters, and, by mere force of life-long habit, much in his usual way; at night he wandered about the Heath, now at a great pace, driven by his passions, now loitering, stumbling. Between dark and dawn he was fifty times in front of the Hoods' house; he watched the extinguishing of the lights in window after window, and, when all were gone, made away with curses on his lips, only to return an hour later, to torture himself with conjecture which room might be Emily's. His sufferings were unutterable. What devil—he groaned—had sent upon him this torment? He wished he were as in former days, when the indifference he felt towards his wife's undeniable beauty had, as it seemed, involved all womankind. In those times he could not have conceived a madness such as this. How had it arisen? Was it a physical illness? Was it madness in truth, or the beginning of it? Why had it not taken him four months ago, when he met this girl at the Baxendales'? But he remembered that even then she had attracted him strangely; he had quitted the others to talk to her. He must have been prepared to conceive this frantic passion on coming together with her again.

Love alone, so felt and so frustrated, would have been bad enough; it was the added pang of jealousy that made it a fierce agony. It was well that the man she had chosen was not within his reach; his mood was that of a murderer. The very heat and vigour of his physical frame, the native violence of his temper, disposed him to brute fury, if an instinct such as this once became acute; and the imaginative energy which lurked in him,

a sort of undeveloped genius, was another source of suffering beyond that which ordinary men endure. He was a fine creature in these hours, colossal, tragic; it needed this experience to bring out all there was of great and exceptional in his character. He was not of those who can quit the scene of their fruitless misery and find forgetfulness at a distance. Every searing stroke drove him more desperately in pursuit of his end. He was further from abandoning it, now that he knew another stood in his way, than he would have been if Emily had merely rejected him. He would not yield her to another man; he swore to himself that he would not, let it cost him and her what it might.

He had seen her again, with his glass, from the windows of the mill, had scarcely moved his eyes from her for an hour. A hope came to him that she might by chance walk at evening on the Heath, but he was disappointed; Emily, indeed, had long shunned walks in that direction. He had no other means of meeting her, yet he anguished for a moment's glimpse of her face.

To-day he knew a cruel assuagement of his torture. He had returned from his short absence with a resolve to risk an attempt which was only not entirely base by virtue of the passion which inspired it, and it appeared to him that his stratagem had succeeded. Scruples he had indeed known, but not at all of the weight they would have possessed for most men, and this not only because of his reckless determination to win by any means; his birth and breeding enabled him to accept meanness as almost a virtue in many of the relations and transactions of life. The trickery and low cunning of the mercantile world was in his blood; it would come out when great occasion saw use for it, even in the service of love. He believed it was leading him to success. Certainly the first result that he aimed at was assured, and he could not imagine a subsequent obstacle. He would not have admitted that he was wronging the man whom he made his tool; if honesty failed under temptation it was honesty's own look out. Ten to one he himself would have fallen into such a trap, in similar circumstances; he was quite free from pharisaical prejudice; had he not reckoned on mere human nature in devising his plan? Nor would the result be cruel, for he had it in his power to repay a hundredfold all temporary pain. There were no limits to the kindness he was capable of, when once he had Emily for his wife; she and hers should be overwhelmed with the

fruits of his devotion. It was to no gross or commonplace future that the mill-owner looked forward. There were things in him of which he was beginning to be conscious, which would lead him he could not yet see whither. Dunfield was no home for Emily; he knew it, and felt that he, too, would henceforth have need of a larger circle of life. He was rich enough, and by transferring his business to other hands he could become yet richer, gaining freedom at the same time. No disappointment would be in store for him as in his former marriage; looking back on that he saw now how boyish he had been, how easily duped. There was not even the excuse of love.

He held her gained. What choice would she have, with the alternative to be put before her? It was strange that, in spite of what should have been sympathetic intelligence, he made a slight account of that love which, as she told him, she had already bestowed. In fact he refused to dwell upon the thought of it; it would have maddened him in earnest. Who could say? It was very possible she had told him a falsehood; it was quite allowable in any woman, to escape from a difficult position. In his heart he did not believe this, knowing her better, though his practical knowledge of her was so slight; but it was one of the devices by which he mitigated his suffering now and then. If the engagement existed, it was probably one of those which contemplated years of waiting, otherwise why should she have kept silence about it at home? In any case he held her; how could she escape him? He did not fear appeals to his compassion; against such assaults he was well armed. Emily pleading at his feet would not be a picture likely to induce him to relax his purpose. She could not take to flight, the very terms of his control restrained her. There might be flaws in his case, legally speaking, but the Hoods were in no position to profit by these, seeing that, in order to do so, they must begin by facing ruin. Emily was assuredly his.

To-day was Friday. He knew, from talk with the Cartwrights, that Jessie's lessons were on alternate days, and as he had seen the two in the garden this morning, there would be no lesson on the morrow. It was not easy to devise a plot for a private interview with Emily, yet he must see her to-morrow, and of course alone. A few words with her would suffice. To call upon her at the house would be only his last resource. He felt assured that she had not spoken to her parents of the

scene in the garden; several reasons supported this belief, especially the reflection that Emily would desire to spare her father the anxieties of a difficult position. Taking this for granted, his relations with her must still be kept secret in order to avoid risking his impunity in the tactics he counted upon. His hope was that she would leave the house alone in the course of the morning.

It has been mentioned that a railway bridge crossed the road a short distance beyond the Hoods' house. On the embankment beyond this bridge, twenty or thirty yards from the road, was a cluster of small trees and shrubs, railed in from the grass which elsewhere grew upon the slope, and from the field at its foot. Here, just hidden behind a hawthorn bush and a climbing bramble, Dagworthy placed himself shortly before eight o'clock on Saturday morning, having approached the spot by a long circuit of trespass; from this position he had a complete view of the house he wished to watch. He came thus early because he thought it possible that Emily accompanied her father on his morning's walk into Dunfield; in which case he would follow at a distance, and find his opportunity as the girl returned. There had been rain in the night, and his passage through the bushes covered him with moisture; the thick grass, too, in which he stood, was so wet that before long his feet grew damp and cold. He was little mindful of bodily discomfort; never moving his eyes for a moment from the door which would give Emily to his view, he knew nothing but the impatience which made it incredible that his watch could keep pace with time; he seemed to have been waiting for hours when yet it was only half-past eight. But at length the door opened. He strained his sight across the distance, but with no reward. Hood left the house alone, and walked off quickly in the direction of Dunfield.

He must wait. It might happen that Emily would not quit home at all during the early part of the day, but he must wait on the chance. He dreaded lest rain should fall, which would naturally keep her within doors, but by nine o'clock the sky had cleared, and he saw the leaves above him drying in the sunlight. Inactivity was at all times intolerable to him; to stand thus for hours was an exercise of impatient patience which only his relentless passion made possible; his body yielded to a sort of numbness, whilst the suffering expectancy of his mind only grew keener. He durst not avert his eyes from the door for an instant; his sight ached and dazzled. Still he waited.

At eleven o'clock Emily came forth. A savage delight seized him as he watched her cross the patch of garden. At the gate she hesitated a moment, then took the way neither to the Heath nor to Dunfield, but crossed to the lane which led to Pendal. From his hiding-place Dagworthy could follow her so far, and with ecstasy he told himself that she must be going to the Castle Hill. She carried a book in her hand.

At length he moved. His limbs had stiffened; it was with difficulty that he climbed to the top of the embankment. Thence he could see the whole track of the lane, which went, indeed, almost parallel with the railway line. He walked in the same direction, keeping at some distance behind Emily. Before reaching the village of Pendal, he had to cross a field and enter the lane itself. There was now the danger that the girl might look back. But she did not. She was reading as she walked, and continued to do so the whole way to the stile which led into the Castle Hill. But now it mattered little if she turned her head.

He let her pass the stile, and himself paused before following. He was agitated; that which he was about to do seemed harder than he had imagined; he had a horrible fear lest his resolution might fail at the last moment. The brute in him for an instant almost slept. The woman in the field yonder was not only the object of his vehement desire; all the nobler possibilities of his nature united to worship her, as the highest and holiest he knew. In his heart was a subtle temptation, the voice of very love bidding him cast himself at her feet and sue but for the grace of so much human kindness as would make life without her endurable. He remembered the self-abasement which had come upon him when he tried to tell her of his love; the offering had seemed so gross, so unworthy to be brought before her. Would it not be the same now? He dreaded her power to protect herself, the secret might of purity which made him shrink at her steady gaze. But he had gone through much in the last fortnight; the brute forces had grown strong by habit of self-assertion. He looked up, and the fact that Emily had gone from his sight stung him into pursuit.

She was sitting where she had sat with Wilfrid, on the fallen tree; the book lay at her side, and she was giving herself to memory. Treading on the grass, he did not attract her attention till he almost stood before her; then she looked at him, and at once rose. He expected signs of apprehension or embarrassment, but she seemed calm. She had accustomed herself to think of

him, and could no longer be taken by surprise. She was self-possessed, too, in the strength of the thoughts which he had disturbed.

He fed his eyes upon her, and kept so long silent that Emily's cheek coloured and she half turned away. Then he spoke abruptly, yet with humility which the consciousness of his purpose could not overcome.

'You know that I have been away since I saw you last. I tried to put you out of my mind. I couldn't do it and I am driven back to you.'

'I hoped we should not meet again like this, Mr. Dagworthy,' Emily replied, in a low voice, but firmly. She felt that her self-respect was to be tested to the uttermost, but she was better able to control herself than at the last interview. The sense of being passionately sought cannot but enhance a woman's dignity in her own eyes, and Emily was not without perception of the features in Dagworthy's character which made him anything but a lover to be contemned. She dreaded him, and could not turn away as from one who tormented her out of mere ill-breeding.

'I cannot ask you to pardon me,' he returned, 'for however often you asked me to leave you, I should pay no heed. I am here because I can't help myself; I mean what I say—I can't, I can't help it! Since you told me there was no hope, I seem to have been in hell. These are not words to use to you—I know it. It isn't that I don't respect you, but because I must speak what I feel. Look—I am worn out with suffering; I feel as if it would take but a little more to kill me, strong man as I am. You don't think I find a pleasure in coming and facing that look you have? I don't know that I ever saw the man I couldn't meet, but before you I feel—I can't put it into words, but I feel I should like to hide my face. Still I have come, I have followed you here. It's more than I can do to give you up.'

At the last words he half sobbed. Her fear of him would not allow Emily to feel deep distress, but she was awed by the terrible evidence of what he endured. She could not at once find words for reply.

'Will you sit down?' he said. 'I will stand here, but I have more to say to you before I go.'

'Why should you say more?' Emily urged. 'Can you not think how very painful it is to hear you speak in this way? What purpose can it serve to speak to me when I may not listen?'

‘You must listen. I can’t be sent away as you would another man; no other on earth can love you as I do, no one. No one would do for you all that I would do. My love gives me a claim upon you. It is you that have brought me to this state; a woman owes a man something who is driven mad by her. I have a right to be here and to say all I feel.’

He was struggling with a dread of the words he had come to utter; a wild hope sprang in him that he might yet win her in other ways; he used language recklessly, half believing that his arguments would seem of force. His passion was in the death-grapple with reason and humanity.

‘If your regard for me is so strong,’ Emily replied, ‘should you not shrink from causing me pain? And indeed you have no such right as you claim. Have I in any way sought to win your affection? Is it manly to press upon me a suit which you know it is out of my power to favour? You say you respect me; your words are not consistent with respect. I owe you nothing, Mr. Dagworthy, and it is certainly my right to demand that you will cease to distress and trouble me.’

He stood with his eyes on the ground.

‘That is all you have to say?’ he asked, almost sullenly.

‘What more can I say? Surely you should not have compelled me to say even so much. I appeal to your kindness, to your sense of what is due from a man to a woman, to let me leave you now, and to make no further attempt to see me. If you refuse, you take advantage of my powerlessness. I am sure you are not capable of that.’

‘Yes, I am capable of more than you think,’ he replied, the words coming between his teeth. His evil demon, not himself, was speaking; in finding utterance at length, it made him deadly pale, and brought a cold sweat to his brow. ‘When you think afterwards of what I say now, remember that it was love of you that made me desperate. A chance you little dream of has put power into my hands, and I am going to use it. I care for nothing on this earth but to make you my wife—and I can do so.’

Terror weighed upon her heart. His tone was that of a man who would stick at nothing, and his words would bear no futile meaning. Her thoughts were at once of her father; through him alone could he have power over her. She waited, sick with agonised anticipation, for what would follow.

'Your father——'

The gulf between purpose and execution once passed, he had become cruel; human nature has often enough exemplified the law in prominent instances. As he pronounced the words, he eyed her deliberately, and, before proceeding, paused just long enough to see the anguish flutter in her breast.

'Your father has been guilty of dishonesty; he has taken money from the mill. Any day that I choose I can convict him.'

She half closed her eyes and shook, as if under a blow. Then the blood rushed to her face, and, to his astonishment, she uttered a strange laugh.

'*That is your power over me!*' she exclaimed, with all the scorn her voice could express. 'Now I know that you are indeed capable of shameful things. You think I shall believe that of my father?'

Dagworthy knew what it was to feel despicable. He would, in this moment, have relinquished all his hope to be able to retract those words. He was like a beaten dog before her; and the excess of his degradation made him brutal.

'Believe it or not, as you choose. All I have to say is that your father put into his pocket yesterday morning a ten-pound note of mine, which he found in a ledger he took out of my room. He had to go to Hebsworth on business, and there he changed the note, to buy himself a new hat; I have a witness of it. When he came back he of course had nothing to say about the money; in fact, he had stolen it.'

She heard, and there came into her mind the story of Cheeseman's debt. That was of ten pounds. The purchase her father had been obliged to make, of that also she had heard. Last night and again this morning, her mother had incessantly marvelled at this money having been at length returned; it was an incredible thing, she had said; only the sight of the coins could convince her of its truth. Emily's mind worked over the details of the previous evening with terrible rapidity and insight. To her directly her father had spoken not a word of the repayment; he had bidden her keep in another room whilst he informed her mother of it; he had shown disinclination to return to the subject when, later, they all sat together. 'Well, here it is,' he had said, 'and we'll talk no more about it.' She heard those words exactly as they were spoken, and she knew their tone was not natural;

even at the time that had struck her, but her thought had not dwelt upon it.

She almost forgot Dagworthy's presence; he and his threats were of small account in this shaking of the depths of her nature. She was awakened by his voice.

'Do you think I am lying to you for my own purposes?'

'I cannot say,' she answered, with unnatural calm. 'It is more likely than that what you say is true.'

He, by now, had attained a self-control which would not desert him. So far in crime, there was no turning back; he could even enjoy the anticipation of each new move in the game, certain of winning. He could be cruel now for cruelty's sake; it was a form of fruition.

'Well,' he said, 'it is your own concern whether you believe me or not. If you wish for evidence, you shall have it, the completest. What I have to say is this. From now till Monday morning your father is free. Whether I have him arrested then or not depends upon yourself. If you consent to become my wife as soon as it is possible for us to be married, neither you nor he will ever hear another word of the matter. What's more, I will at once put him in a position of comfort. If you refuse, there will be a policeman ready to arrest him as soon as he comes to the mill; if he tries to escape, a warrant will be issued. In any case he will be ruined.'

Then, after a pause—

'So you have till to-morrow night to make up your mind. You can either send me a note or come and see me; I shall be at home whenever you come.'

Emily stood in silence.

'I hope you quite understand what I mean,' Dagworthy continued, as if discussing an ordinary matter of business. 'No one will ever dream that your father has done anything to be ashamed of. After all, it is not so impossible that you should marry me for my own sake;'—he said it with bitterness. 'People will see nothing to wonder at. Fortunately, no one knows of that—of what you told me. Your father and mother will be easy for the rest of their lives, and without a suspicion that there has been anything but what appears on the surface. I needn't say how things are likely to look in the other event.'

Still she stood silent.

'I don't expect an answer now——'

Emily shook her head.

'But,' he continued, 'you mustn't leave it after to-morrow night. It will be too late.'

She began to move away from him. With a step or two he followed her; she turned, with a passionate movement of repulsion, terror, and hate transfiguring her countenance, made for the expression of all sweet and tender and noble things.

Dagworthy checked himself, turned about, and walked quickly from the place.

(To be continued.)

